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By E Nesbit.

THE dark arch that led to the witch's cave was hung round with a black and yellow fringe of live snakes. As the Queen went in, keeping very carefully exactly in the middle of the arch, all the snakes lifted their wicked, flat heads and stared at her with their wicked, yellow eyes. You know it is not manners to stare, even at a Queen. And the snakes had been so badly brought up that they even put their tongues out at the poor lady. Nasty, thin, sharp tongues they were, too.

Now, the Queen's husband was, of course, the King. And besides being a King he was an enchanter, and considered to be quite at the top of his profession: so he was very wise, and he knew that when Kings and Queens want children, the Queen always goes to see a witch. So he gave the Queen the witch's address, and the Queen called on her, though she was very frightened and did not like it at all. The witch was sitting by a fire of sticks, stirring something bubbly in a shiny, copper cauldron.

"What do *you* want, my dear?" she said to the Queen.

"Oh, if you please," said the Queen, "I want a baby—a very nice one. We don't want any expense spared. My husband said——"

"Oh, yes," said the witch; "I know all about *him*. And so you want a child? Do you know it will bring you sorrow?"

"It will bring me joy first," said the Queen.

"Great sorrow," said the witch.

"Greater joy," said the Queen.

Then the witch said, "Well, have your own way. I suppose it's as much as your place is worth to go back without it?"

"The King would be very much annoyed," said the poor Queen.

"Well, well," said the witch; "what will you give me for the child?"

"Anything you ask for, and all I have," said the Queen.

"Then give me your gold crown."

The Queen took it off quickly.

"And your necklace of blue sapphires."

The Queen unfastened it
"And your pearl bracelets"
The Queen unclasped them.
"And your ruby clasps"
And the Queen undid the clasps.
"Now the lilies from your breast."
The Queen gathered together the lilies
"And the diamonds of your little bright shoe-buckles."
The Queen pulled off her shoes.

Then the witch stirred the stuff that was in the cauldron, and, one by one, she threw in the gold crown, and the sapphire necklace, and the pearl bracelets, and the ruby clasps, and the diamonds of the little bright shoe-buckles, and, last of all, she threw in the lilies.

And the stuff in the cauldron boiled up in foaming flashes of yellow, and blue, and red, and white, and silver, and sent out a sweet scent, and presently the witch poured it out into a pipkin and set it to cool in the doorway among the snakes.

Then she said to the Queen: "Your child will have hair as golden as your crown, eyes as blue as your sapphires. The red of your rubies will lie on its lips, and its skin will be clear white as your pearls. Its soul will be white and sweet as your lilies, and your diamonds will be no clearer than its wits."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," said the Queen, "and when will it come?"

"You will find it when you get home."

"And won't you have something for yourself?" asked the Queen. "Any little thing you fancy—would you like a country, or a sack of jewels?"

"Nothing, thank you," said the witch. "I could make more diamonds in a day than I could wear in a year."

"Well, but do let me do some little thing for you," the Queen went on. "Aren't you tired of being a witch? Wouldn't you like to be a duchess or a Princess, or something like that?"

"There is one thing I should rather like," said the witch, "but it's hard to get in my trade."

"Oh, tell me what," said the Queen.

"I should like someone to love me," said the witch.

Then the Queen threw her arms round the witch's neck and kissed her half a hundred times. "Why," she said, "I love you better than my life. You've given me the baby—and the baby shall love you, too."

"Perhaps it will," said the witch, "and when the sorrow comes send for me. Each of your fifty kisses will be a spell to bring me to you. Now, drink up your medicine, there's a dear, and run along home."

So the Queen drank the stuff in the pipkin, which was quite cool by this time, and she went out under the fringe of snakes, and they all behaved like good Sunday-school children. Some of them even tried to drop a curtsy to her as she went by, though that is not easy when you are hanging wrong way up by your tail. But the snakes knew the Queen was friends with their mistress; so, of course, they had to do their best to be civil.

When the Queen got home, sure enough there was the baby lying in the cradle, with the Royal arms blazoned on it, crying as naturally as possible. It had pink ribbons to tie up its sleeves: so the Queen saw at once it was a *girl*. When the King knew this he tore his black hair with fury.

"Oh, you silly, silly Queen!" he said. "Why didn't I marry a clever lady? Did you think I went to all the trouble and expense of sending you to a witch to get a *girl*? You knew well enough it was a boy I wanted—a boy, an heir, a Prince—to learn all my magic and my enchantments, and to rule the kingdom after me. I'll bet a crown—my crown," he said, "you never even thought to tell the witch what kind you wanted! Did you now?"

And the Queen hung her head and had to confess that she had only asked for a *child*.

"Very well, madam," said the King, "very well—have your own way. And make the most of your daughter, while she *is* a child."

The Queen did. All the years of her life had never held half so much happiness as now lived in each of the moments when she held her little baby in her arms. And the years went on, and the King grew more and more clever at magic, and more and more disagreeable at home, and the Princess grew more beautiful and more dear every day she lived.

The Queen and the Princess were feeding the gold-fish in the courtyard fountains with crumbs of the Princess's eighteenth birthday cake, when the King came into the courtyard, looking as black as thunder, with his black raven hopping after him. He shook his fist at his family, as indeed he generally did whenever he met them, for he was not a King with pretty home manners. The raven sat down on the edge of the marble basin and tried to peck the gold fish. It was all he could do to show that he was in the same temper as his master.

"A girl indeed!" said the King, angrily. "I wonder you can dare to look me in the

"HE SHOOK HIS FIST AT HIS FAMILY"

face, when you remember how your silliness has spoiled everything."

"You oughtn't to speak to my mother like that," said the Princess. She was eighteen, and it came to her suddenly and all in a moment that she was a grown-up; so she spoke out.

The King could not utter a word for several minutes. He was too angry. But the Queen said, "My dear child, don't interfere," quite crossly, for she was frightened.

And to her husband she said, "My dear, why do you go on worrying about it? Our daughter is not a boy, it is true—but she may marry a clever man who could rule your kingdom after you, and learn as much magic as ever you cared to teach him."

Then the King found his tongue.

"If she *does* marry," he said, slowly, "her husband will have to be a *very* clever man—oh, yes, very clever indeed! And he will have to know a very great deal more magic than *I* shall ever care to teach him."

The Queen knew at once by the King's tone that he was going to be disagreeable.

"Ah," she said, "don't punish the child because she loves her mother."

"I'm not going to punish her for *that*," said he; "I'm only going to teach her to respect her father."

And without another word he went off to his laboratory and worked all night, boiling different coloured things in crucibles, and copying charms in curious twisted letters from old brown books with mould stains on their yellowy pages.

The next day his plan was all arranged. He took the poor Princess to the Lone Tower, which stands on an island in the sea, a thousand miles from everywhere. He gave her a dowry, and settled a handsome income on her. He engaged a competent dragon to look after her, and also a respectable griffin whose birth and bringing-up he knew all about. And he said—

"Here you shall stay, my dear, respectful daughter, till the clever man comes to marry you. He'll have to be clever enough to sail a ship through the Nine Whirlpools that spin round the island, and to kill the dragon and the griffin. Till he comes you'll never get any older or any wiser. No doubt he will soon come. You can employ yourself in embroidering your wedding gown. I wish you joy, my dutiful child."

And his car, drawn by five thunderbolts (thunder travels very fast), rose in the air and disappeared, and the poor Princess was left, with the dragon and the griffin, in the Island of the Nine Whirlpools.

The Queen, left at home, cried for a day and a night, and then she remembered the witch and called to her. And the witch came, and the Queen told her all.

"For the sake of the twice twenty-five kisses you gave me," said the witch, "I will help you. But it is the last thing I can do, and it is not much. Your daughter is under a spell, and I can take you to her. But, if I do, you will have to be turned to stone, and to stay so till the spell is taken off the child."

"I would be a stone for a thousand years," said the poor Queen, "if at the end of them I could see my Dear again."

So the witch took the Queen in a car drawn by five sunbeams (which travel more quickly than anything else in the world, and much quicker than thunder), and so away and away to the Lone Tower on the Island of the Nine Whirlpools. And there was the Princess sitting on the floor in the best room of the Lone Tower, crying as if her heart would break, and the dragon and the griffin were sitting primly on each side of her.

"Oh, mother, mother, mother," she cried, and hung round the Queen's neck as if she would never let go.

"Now," said the witch, when they had all cried as much as was good for them, "I can do one or two other little things for you. Time shall not make the Princess sad. All days will be like one day till her deliverer comes. And you and I, dear Queen, will sit in stone at the gate of the tower. In doing this for you I lose all my witch's powers, and when I say the spell that changes you to stone, I shall change with you, and if ever we come out of the stone, I shall be a witch no more, but only a happy old woman."

Then the three kissed each other again and again, and the witch said the spell, and on each side of the door there was now a stone lady. One of them had a stone crown on its head and a stone sceptre in its hand; but the other held a stone tablet with words on it, which the griffin and the dragon could not read, though they had both had a very good education.

And now all days seemed like one day to the Princess, and the next day always seemed the day when her mother would come out of the stone and kiss her again. And the years went slowly by.

The wicked King died, and someone else took his kingdom, and many things were changed in the world, but the island did not change, nor the Nine Whirlpools, nor the griffin, nor the dragon, nor the two stone ladies. And all the time, from the very first,

"THE LONE TOWER ON THE ISLAND OF THE NINE WHIRLPOOLS."

the day of the Princess's deliverance was coming, creeping nearer, and nearer, and nearer. But no one saw it coming except the Princess, and she only in dreams. And the years went by in tens and in hundreds, and still the Nine Whirlpools spun round, roaring in triumph the story of many a good ship that had gone down in their swirl, bearing with it some Prince who had tried to win the Princess and her dowry. And the great sea knew all the other stories of the Princes who had come from very far, and had seen the whirlpools, and had shaken their wise heads and said "'Bout ship!" and gone discreetly home to their nice, safe, comfortable kingdoms.

But no one told the story of the deliverer who was to come. And the years went by

Now, after more scores of years than you would like to add up on your slate, a certain sailor-boy sailed on the high seas with his uncle, who was a skilled skipper. And the boy could reef a sail, and coil a rope, and keep the ship's nose steady before the wind. And he was as good a boy as you would find in a month of Sundays, and worthy to be a Prince.

Now there is Something which is wiser than all the world—and it knows when people are worthy to be Princes. And this Something came from the farther side of the seventh world, and whispered in the boy's ear.

And the boy heard, though he did not know he heard—and he looked out over the black sea with the white foam horses galloping over it, and far away he saw a light. And he said to the skipper, his uncle:—

"What light is that?"

Then the skipper said, "All good things defend you, Nigel, from sailing near that light. It is not mentioned in all charts; but it is marked in the old chart I steer by, which was my father's father's before me, and his father's father's before him. It is the light that shines from the Lone Tower that stands above the Nine Whirlpools. And when my father's father was young he heard from the very old man, his great-great-grandfather, that in that tower an enchanted Princess, fairer than the day, waits to be delivered. But there is no deliverance so never steer that way, and think no more of the Princess, for that is only an idle tale. But the whirlpools are quite real."

So, of course, from that day Nigel thought of nothing else. And as he sailed hither and thither upon the high seas he saw from time to time the light that shone out to sea across the wild swirl of the Nine Whirlpools. And one night, when the ship was at anchor and the skipper asleep in his bunk, Nigel launched the ship's boat and steered alone over the dark sea towards the light. He dared not go very near till daylight should show him what, indeed, were the whirlpools he had to dread.

But when the dawn came he saw the Lone Tower stand dark against the pink and primrose of the east—and about its base the sullen swirl of black water, and he heard the wonderful roar of it. So he hung off, and all that day and for six days besides. And when he had watched seven days he knew something. For you are certain to know something if you give for seven days your whole thought to it, even though it be only the first declension, or the nine-times table, or the dates of the Norman Kings.

What he knew was this: that for five minutes out of the 1,440 minutes that make up a day the whirlpools slipped into silence, while the tide went down and left the yellow sand bare. And every day this happened, but every day it was five minutes earlier than it had been the day before. He made sure of this by the ship's chronometer, which he had thoughtfully brought with him.

So on the eighth day at five minutes before noon Nigel got ready. But when the whirlpools suddenly stopped whirling and the tide sank, like water in a basin that has a hole in it, he stuck to his oars and put his back into his stroke, and presently beached the boat on the yellow sand. Then he dragged her into a cave, and sat down to wait.

By five minutes and one second past noon, the whirlpools were black and busy again, and Nigel peeped out of his cave. And on the rocky ledge overhanging the sea he saw a Princess as beautiful as the day, with golden hair and a green gown—and he went out to meet her.

"I've come to save you," he said. "How darling and beautiful you are!"

"You are very good, and very clever, and very dear," said the Princess, smiling and giving him both her hands.

He shut a little kiss in each hand before he let them go.

"So now, when the tide is low again, I will take you away in my boat," he said.

"But what about the dragon and the griffin?" asked the Princess.

"Dear me," said Nigel, "I didn't know about them. I suppose I can kill them?"

"Don't be a silly boy," said the Princess,

"HE SHUT A LITTLE KISS IN EACH HAND."

pretending to be very grown-up, for, though she had been on the island Time only knows how many years, she was still only eighteen, and she still liked pretending. "You haven't a sword, or a shield, or anything!"

"Well, don't the beasts ever go to sleep?"

"Why, yes," said the Princess, "but only once in twenty-four hours, and then the dragon is turned to stone. But the griffin has dreams. The griffin sleeps at tea time every day, but the dragon sleeps every day for five minutes, and every day it is three minutes later than it was the day before."

"What time does he sleep to-day?" asked Nigel.

"At eleven," said the Princess.

"Ah," said Nigel, "can you do sums?"

"No," said the Princess, sadly. "I was never good at them."

"Then I must," said Nigel. "I *can*; but it's slow work, and it makes me very unhappy. It'll take me days and days."

"Don't begin yet," said the Princess; "you'll have plenty of time to be unhappy in when I'm gone. Tell me all about yourself."

So he did. And then she told him all about herself.

"I know I've been here a long time," she said, "but I don't know what time is. And I am very busy sewing silk flowers in a golden gown for my wedding-day. And the griffin does the housework—his wings are so convenient and feathery for sweeping and dusting, and the dragon does the cooking: he's hot inside, so, of course, it's no trouble to him; and though I don't know what time is I'm sure it's time for my wedding day, because my golden gown only wants one more white daisy on the sleeve, and a lily on the bosom of it, and then it will be ready."

Just then they heard a dry, rustling clatter on the rocks above them and a snorting sound.

"It's the dragon," said the Princess, hurriedly. "Good bye. Be a good boy, and get your sum done." And she ran away and left him to his arithmetic.

Now the sum was this: "If the whirlpools stop and the tide goes down once in every twenty-four hours, and gets five minutes earlier every twenty-four hours, and if the dragon sleeps every day, and does it three minutes later every day, in how many days

and at what time in the day will the tide go down three minutes before the dragon falls asleep?"

It is quite a simple sum, as you see *you* could do it in a minute because you have been to a good school, and have taken pains with your lessons; but it was quite otherwise with poor Nigel. He sat down to work out his sum with a piece of chalk on a smooth stone. He tried it by practice and the unitary method, by multiplication, and by rule-of-three-and-three-quarters. He tried it by decimals and by compound interest. He tried it by square-root and by cube-root. He tried it by addition, simple and otherwise, and he tried it by mixed examples in vulgar fractions. But it was all of no use. Then he tried to do the sum by algebra, by simple and by quadratic equations, by trigonometry, by logarithms, and by conic sections. But it would not do. He got an answer every time, it is true, but it was always a different one, and he could not feel sure which answer was right.

And just as he was feeling how much more important than anything else it is to be able to do your sums, the Princess came back. And now it was getting dark.

"Why, you've been seven hours over that sum," she said, "and you haven't done it yet. Look here, this is what is written on the tablet of the statue by the lower gate. It has figures in it. Perhaps it is the answer to the sum."

She held out to him a big white magnolia leaf. And she had scratched on it with the pin of her pearl brooch, and it had turned brown where she had scratched it, as magnolia leaves will do. Nigel read:—

AFTER NINE DAYS
T 11. 24
D 11 27 Ans.
I' $.—And the griffin is artificial. R.

He clapped his hands softly.

"Dear Princess," he said, "I know that's the right answer. It says R, too, you see. But I'll just prove it." So he hastily worked the sum backwards in decimals and equations and conic sections, and all the rules he could think of. And it came right every time.

"So now we must wait," said he. And they waited.

And every day the Princess came to see Nigel and brought him food cooked by the

"EVERY DAY THE PRINCESS CAME TO SEE NIGEL AND BROUGHT HIM FOOD."

dragon, and he lived in his cave, and talked to her when she was there, and thought about her when she was not, and they were both as happy as the longest day in summer. Then at last came The Day. Nigel and the Princess laid their plans.

"You're sure he won't hurt *you*, my only treasure?" said Nigel.

"Quite," said the Princess. "I only wish I were half as sure that he wouldn't hurt *you*."

"My Princess," he said, tenderly, "two

great powers are on our side: the power of Love and the power of Arithmetic. Those two are stronger than anything else in the world."

So when the tide began to go down Nigel and the Princess ran out on to the sands, and there, full in sight of the terrace where the dragon kept watch, Nigel took his Princess in his arms and kissed her. The griffin was busy sweeping the stairs of the Lone Tower, but the dragon saw, and he gave a cry of rage—and it was like twenty engines all letting off steam at the top of their voices inside Cannon Street Station.

And the two lovers stood looking up at the dragon. He was dreadful to look at. His head was white with age—and his beard had grown so long that he caught his claws in it as he walked. His wings were white with the salt that had settled on them from the spray of the sea. His tail was long and thick and jointed and white, and had little legs to it, any number of them—far too many—so that it looked like a very large fat silkworm; and his claws were as long as lessons, and as sharp as bayonets.

"Good bye, love!" cried Nigel, and ran out across the yellow sand towards the sea. He had one end of a cord tied to his arm.

The dragon was clambering down the face of the cliff, and next moment he was crawling and writhing and sprawling and wriggling across the beach after Nigel, making great holes in the sand with his heavy feet—and the very end of his tail, where there were no legs, made as it dragged a mark in the sand such as you make when you launch a boat, and he breathed fire till the wet sand hissed again, and the water of

"HE BREATHED FIRE TILL THE WET SAND HISSED AGAIN."

the little rock pools got quite frightened, and all went off in steam.

And still Nigel held on and the dragon after him.

The Princess could see nothing for the steam, and she stood crying bitterly, but still holding on tight with her right hand to the other end of the cord which Nigel had told her to hold; while with her left she held the ship's chronometer, and looked at it through her tears as he had bidden her look, so as to know when to pull the rope.

On went Nigel over the sand, and on went the dragon after him. And the tide was low, and sleepy little waves lapped the sand's edge.

Now at the lip of the water Nigel paused and looked back, and the dragon made a bound, beginning a scream of rage that was like all the engines of all the railways in England. But it never uttered the second half of that scream, for now it knew suddenly that it was sleepy it turned to hurry back to dry land, because sleeping near whirlpools is so unsafe. But before it reached the shore sleep caught it and turned it to stone. And Nigel, seeing this, ran shoreward for his life—and the tide began to flow in, and the time of the whirlpool's sleep was nearly over, and he stumbled and he waded and he swam, and the Princess pulled for dear life at the cord in her hand, and pulled him up on to the dry shelf of rock just as the great sea dashed in and made itself once more into the girdle of Nine Whirlpools all round the island.

But the dragon was asleep under the whirlpools, and when he woke up from being asleep he found he was drowned, so there was an end of him.

"Now, there's only the griffin," said Nigel. And the Princess said:—

"Yes—only——" And she kissed Nigel and went back to sew the last leaf of the last lily on the bosom of her wedding gown. And she thought and thought of what was written on the stone above the griffin being artificial—and next day she said to Nigel:—

"You know a griffin is half a lion and half an eagle, and the other two halves when they're joined make the leo-griff. But I've never seen *him*. Yet I have an idea."

So they talked it over and arranged every thing.

Then when the griffin fell asleep that after noon at tea-time, Nigel went softly behind him and trod on his tail, and at the same time the Princess cried: "Look out! there's a lion behind you."

And the griffin, waking suddenly from his dreams, twisted his large neck round to look for the lion, and saw a lion's flank, and fastened its eagle beak in it. For the griffin had been artificially made by the King-enchanter, and the two halves had never really got used to each other. So now the eagle half of the griffin, who was still rather sleepy, believed that it was fighting a lion, and the lion-part, being half asleep, thought it was fighting an eagle, and the whole griffin in its deep drowsiness hadn't the sense to pull itself together and remember what it was made of. So the griffin rolled over and over, one end of it fighting with the other, till the eagle end pecked the lion end to death, and the lion end tore the eagle end with its claws till it died. And so the griffin that was made of a lion and an eagle perished, exactly as if it had been made of Kilkenny cats.

"Poor griffin," said the Princess, "it was very good at the house-work. I always liked it better than the dragon: it wasn't so hot-tempered."

And at that moment there was a soft, silky rush behind the Princess, and there was her mother, the Queen, who had slipped out of the stone statue directly the griffin was dead, and now came hurrying to take her dear daughter in her arms. The witch was clambering slowly off her pedestal. She was a little stiff with standing still so long.

When they had all explained everything over and over to each other as many times as was good for them, the witch said:—

"Well, but what about the whirlpools?" And Nigel said he didn't know. Then the witch said: "I'm not a witch any more. I'm only a happy old woman, but I know some things still. Those whirlpools were made by the enchanter-King's dropping nine drops of his blood into the sea. And his blood was so wicked that the sea has been trying ever since to get rid of it, and that made the whirlpools. Now you've only got to go out at low tide——"

So Nigel understood and went out at low tide, and found in the sandy hollow left by the first whirlpool a great red ruby. And that was the first drop of the wicked King's blood. And next day Nigel found another, and next day another, and so on till the ninth day, and then the sea was as smooth as glass.

The nine rubies were used afterwards in agriculture. You had only to throw them out into a field if you wanted it ploughed. Then the whole surface of the land turned itself over in its anxiety to get rid of some

thing so wicked, and in the morning the field was found to be ploughed as thoroughly as any young man at Oxford. So the wicked King did some good after all.

When the sea was smooth, ships came from far and wide bringing people to hear the wonderful story. And a beautiful palace was built, and the Princess was married to Nigel in her gold dress, and they all lived happily as long as was good for them.

The dragon still lies, a stone dragon on the sand, and at low tide the little children play round him and over him. But the pieces that were left of the griffin were buried under the herb-bed in the palace garden, because it had been so good at house-work, and it wasn't its fault that it had been made so badly and put to such poor work as guarding a lady from her lover.

I have no doubt that you will wish to know what the Princess lived on during the long years when the dragon did the cooking. My dear, she lived on her income: and that is a thing which a great many people would like to be able to do.

"LITTLE CHILDREN PLAY ROUND HIM AND OVER HIM"

By E. Nesbit.

THERE was once an old, old castle—it was so old that its walls and towers and turrets and gateways and arches had crumbled to ruins, and of all its old splendour there were only two little rooms left; and it was here that John the blacksmith had set up his forge. He was too poor to live in a proper house, and no one asked any rent for the rooms in the ruin, because all the lords of the castle were dead and gone this many a year. So there John blew his bellows, and hammered his iron, and did all the work which came his way. This was not much, because most of the trade went to the mayor of the town, who was also a blacksmith in quite a large way of business, and had his huge forge facing the square of the town, and had twelve apprentices, all hammering like a nest of woodpeckers, and twelve journeymen to order the apprentices about, and a patent forge and a self-acting hammer and electric bellows, and all things handsome about him. So that of course the townspeople, whenever they wanted a horse shod or a shaft mended, went to the mayor. And John the blacksmith struggled on as best he could, with a few odd jobs from travellers and strangers who did not know what a superior forge the mayor's was. The two rooms were warm and weather-tight, but not very large; so the blacksmith got into the way of keeping his old iron, and his odds and ends, and his fagots, and his twopennorths of coal in the great dungeon down under the castle. It was a very fine dungeon indeed, with a handsome vaulted roof and big iron rings, whose staples were built into the wall, very strong and convenient for tying captives up to, and at one end was a broken flight of wide steps leading down no one knew where. Even the lords of the castle in the good old times had never known where those steps led to, but every now and then they would kick a prisoner down the steps in their light-hearted, hopeful way, and, sure enough, the prisoners never came back. The blacksmith had never dared to go beyond the seventh step, and no more have I—so I know no more than he did what was at the bottom of those stairs.

John the blacksmith had a wife and a little baby. When his wife was not doing the house-work she used to nurse the baby and cry, remembering the happy days when she lived with her father, who kept seventeen cows and lived quite in the country, and when John used to come courting her in the summer evenings, as smart as smart, with a posy in his button-hole. And now John's hair was getting grey, and there was hardly ever enough to eat.

As for the baby, it cried a good deal at odd times, but at night, when its mother had settled down to sleep, it would always begin to cry, quite as a matter of course, so that she hardly got any rest at all. This made her very tired. The baby could make up for its bad nights during the day, if it liked, but the poor mother couldn't. So whenever she had nothing to do she used to sit and cry, because she was tired out with work and worry.

One evening the blacksmith was busy with his forge He was making a goat shoe for the goat of a very rich lady, who wished to see how the goat liked being shod, and also whether the shoe would come to fivepence or sevenpence before she ordered the whole set This was the only order John had had that week. And as he worked his wife sat and nursed the baby, who, for a wonder, was not crying.

Presently, over the noise of the bellows, and over the clank of the iron, there came another sound. The blacksmith and his wife looked at each other

"I heard nothing," said he.

"Neither did I," said she

But the noise grew louder—and the two were so anxious not to hear it that he hammered away at the goat-shoe harder than he had ever hammered in his life, and she began to sing to the baby—a thing she had not had the heart to do for weeks.

But through the blowing and hammering and singing the noise came louder and louder—and the more they tried not to hear it, the more they had to It was like the noise of some great creature purring, purring, purring—and the reason they did not want to believe they really heard it was, that it came from the great dungeon down below, where the old iron was, and the firewood and the twopenn'orth of coal, and the broken steps that went down into the dark and ended no one knew where

"It *can't* be anything in the dungeon," said the blacksmith, wiping his face. "Why, I shall have to go down there after more coals in a minute"

"There isn't anything there, of course. How could there be?" said his wife And they tried so hard to believe that there could be nothing there that presently they very nearly did believe it.

Then the blacksmith took his shovel in one hand and his riveting hammer in the other, and hung the old stable lantern on his little finger, and went down to get the coals

"I am not taking the hammer because I think there is anything there," said he, "but it is handy for breaking the large lumps of coal"

"I quite understand," said his wife, who had brought the coal home in her apron that very afternoon, and knew that it was all coal-dust.

So he went down the winding stairs to the dungeon, and stood at the bottom of the steps holding the lantern above his head just to see that the dungeon really *was* empty, as usual Half of it was empty as usual, except for the old iron and odds and ends, and the firewood and the coals But the other side was not empty It was quite full, and what it was full of was *Dragon*.

"It must have come up those nasty broken steps from goodness knows where," said the blacksmith to himself, trembling all over, as he tried to creep back up the winding stairs

But the dragon was too quick for him—it put out a great claw and caught him by the leg, and as it moved it rattled like a great bunch of keys, or like the sheet iron they make thunder out of in the pantomime

"THE DRAGON WAS TOO QUICK FOR HIM."

"No you don't," said the dragon, in a spluttering voice, like a damp squib.

"Deary, deary me," said poor John, trembling more than ever in the claw of the dragon; "here's a nice end for a respectable blacksmith!"

The dragon seemed very much struck by this remark.

"Do you mind saying that again?" said he, quite politely.

So John said again, very distinctly:—

"Here—Is—A—Nice—End—For—A—Respectable—Blacksmith."

"I didn't know," said the dragon. "Fancy now! You're the very man I wanted."

"So I understood you to say before," said John, his teeth chattering.

"Oh, I don't mean what you mean," said the dragon; "but I should like you to do a job for me. One of my wings has got some of the rivets out of it just above the joint. Could you put them to rights?"

"I might, sir," said John, politely, for you must always be polite to a possible customer, even if he be a dragon.

"A master craftsman—you *are* a master, of course?—can see in a minute what's wrong," the dragon went on. "Just come round here and feel of my plates, will you?"

John timidly went round when the dragon took his claw away; and, sure enough, the dragon's off wing was hanging loose and all anyhow, and several of the plates near the joint certainly wanted riveting.

The dragon seemed to be made almost entirely of iron armour—a sort of tawny, red rust colour it was; from damp, no doubt—and under it he seemed to be covered with something furry.

All the blacksmith welled up in John's heart, and he felt more at ease.

"You could certainly do with a rivet or two, sir," said he; "in fact, you want a good many."

"Well, get to work, then," said the dragon. "You mend my wing, and then I'll go out and eat up all the town, and if you make a really smart job of it I'll eat you last. There!"

"I don't want to be eaten last, sir," said John.

"Well, then, I'll eat you *first*," said the dragon.

"I don't want that, sir, either," said John.

"Go on with you, you silly man," said the dragon; "you don't know your own silly mind. Come, set to work!"

"I don't like the job, sir," said John, "and that's the truth. I know how easily accidents happen. It's all fair and smooth, and 'Please rivet me, and I'll eat you last'—and then you get to work and you give a gentleman a bit of a nip or a dig under his rivets—and then it's fire and smoke, and no apologies will meet the case."

"Upon my word of honour as a dragon," said the other.

"I know you wouldn't do it on purpose, sir," said John, "but any gentleman will give a jump and a sniff if he's nipped, and one of your sniffs would be enough for me. Now, if you'd just let me fasten you up?"

"It would be so undignified," objected the dragon.

"We always fasten a horse up," said John, "and he's the 'noble animal.'"

"It's all very well," said the dragon, "but how do I know you'd untie me again when you'd riveted me? Give me something in pledge. What do you value most?"

"My hemmer," said John. "A blacksmith is nothing without a hemmer."

"But you'd want that for riveting me. You must think of something else, and at once, or I'll eat you first."

At this moment the baby in the room above began to scream. Its mother had been so quiet that it thought she had settled down for the night, and that it was time to begin.

"Whatever's that?" said the dragon—starting so that every plate on his body rattled.

"It's only the baby," said John.

"What's that?" asked the dragon—"something you value?"

"Well, yes, sir, rather," said the blacksmith.

"Then bring it here," said the dragon; "and I'll take care of it till you've done riveting me, and you shall tie me up."

"All right, sir," said John; "but I ought to warn you. Babies are poison to dragons, so I don't deceive you. It's all right to touch—but don't you go putting it into your mouth. I shouldn't like to see any harm come to a nice-looking gentleman like you."

The dragon purred at this compliment and said—

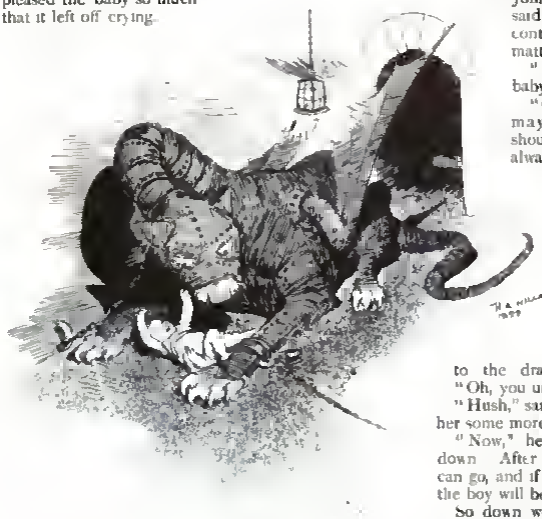
"All right, I'll be careful. Now go and fetch the thing, whatever it is."

So John ran up the steps as quickly as he could, for he knew that if the dragon got impatient before it was fastened up, it could heave up the roof of the dungeon with one heave of its back, and kill them all in the ruins. His wife was asleep, in spite of the baby's cries; and John picked up the baby

and took it down and put it between the dragon's front paws

"You just purr to it, sir," he said, "and it'll be as good as gold."

So the dragon purred, and his purring pleased the baby so much that it left off crying.



"THE DRAGON'S PURRING PLEASED THE BABY"

Then John rummaged among the heap of old iron and found there some heavy chains and a great collar that had been made in the days when men sang over their work and put their hearts into it, so that the things they made were strong enough to bear the weight of a thousand years, let alone a dragon.

John fastened the dragon up with the collar and the chains, and when he had padlocked them all on safely he set to work to find out how many rivets would be needed

"Six, eight, ten—twenty, forty," said he. "I haven't half enough rivets in the shop. If you'll excuse me, sir, I'll step round to another forge and get a few dozen. I won't be a minute."

And off he went, leaving the baby between the dragon's fore-paws, laughing and crowing with pleasure at the very large purr of it

John ran as hard as he could into the town, and found the mayor and corporation.

"There's a dragon in my dungeon," he said, "I've chained him up. Now come and help to get my baby away."

And he told them all about it.

But they all happened to have engagements for that evening; so they praised John's cleverness, and said they were quite content to leave the matter in his hands.

"But what about my baby?" said John

"Oh, well," said the mayor, "if anything should happen, you will always be able to remember that your baby perished in a good cause."

So John went home again, and told his wife some of the tale

"You've given the baby to the dragon!" she cried. "Oh, you unnatural parent!"

"Hush," said John, and he told her some more

"Now," he said, "I'm going down After I've been down you can go, and if you keep your head the boy will be all right."

So down went the blacksmith, and there was the dragon purring away with all his might to keep the baby quiet.

"Hurry up, can't you?" he said. "I can't keep up this noise all night"

"I'm very sorry, sir," said the blacksmith, "but all the shops are shut The job must wait till the morning And don't forget you've promised to take care of that baby. You'll find it a little wearing, I'm afraid. Good night, sir"

The dragon had purred till he was quite out of breath—so now he stopped, and as soon as everything was quiet the baby thought everyone must have settled for the night, and that it was time to begin to scream. So it began.

"Oh, dear," said the dragon, "this is awful!"

He patted the baby with his claw, but it screamed more than ever

"And I am so tired, too," said the dragon. "I did so hope I should have had a good night."

The baby went on screaming.

"There'll be no peace for me after this," said the dragon, "it's enough to ruin one's nerves. Hush, then—did 'ums, then." And he tried to quiet the baby as if it had been a young dragon. But when he began to sing "Hush-a-by, dragon," the baby screamed more and more and more. "I can't keep it quiet," said the dragon, and then suddenly he saw a woman sitting on the steps. "Here, I say," said he, "do you know anything about babies?"

"I do, a little," said the mother.

"Then I wish you'd take this one, and let me get some sleep," said the dragon, yawning. "You can bring it back in the morning before the blacksmith comes."

So the mother picked up the baby and took it upstairs and told her husband, and they went to bed happy, for they had caught the dragon and saved the baby.

And next day John went down and explained carefully to the dragon exactly how matters stood, and he got an iron gate with a grating to it, and set it up at the foot of the steps, and the dragon mewed furiously for days and days, but when he found it was no good he was quiet.

So now John went to the mayor and said:—

"I've got the dragon and I've saved the town."

"Noble preserver," cried the mayor, "we will get up a subscription for you, and crown you in public with a laurel wreath."

So the mayor put his name down for five pounds, and the corporation each gave three, and other people gave their guineas and half-guineas, and half crowns and crowns, and while the subscription was being made the mayor ordered three poems at his own expense from the town poet to celebrate the occasion. The poems were very much admired, especially by the mayor and corporation.

The first poem dealt with the noble conduct of the mayor in arranging to have the dragon tied up. The second described the splendid assistance rendered by the corporation. And the third expressed the pride and joy of the poet in being permitted to sing such deeds, beside which the actions of St. George must appear quite commonplace to all with a feeling heart or a well balanced brain.

When the subscription was finished there was a thousand pounds, and a committee was formed to settle what should be done with it. A third of it went to pay for a banquet to the mayor and corporation, another third was spent in buying a gold collar with a dragon on it for the mayor, and gold medals with dragons on them for the corporation, and what was left went in committee expenses.

So there was nothing for the blacksmith except the laurel wreath, and the knowledge that it really *was* he who had saved the town. But after this things went a little better with the blacksmith. To begin with, the baby did not cry so much as it had before. Then the rich lady who owned the goat was so touched by John's noble action that she ordered a complete set of shoes at 2s. 4d., and even made it up to 2s. 6d. in grateful recognition of his public spirited conduct.

Then tourists used to come in breaks from quite a long way off, and pay twopence each to go down the steps and peep through the iron grating at the

rusty dragon in the dungeon—and it was threepence extra for each party if the blacksmith let off coloured fire to see it by, which, as the fire was extremely short, was twopence-halfpenny clear profit every time. And the blacksmith's wife used to provide teas at ninepence a head, and altogether things grew brighter week by week.

The baby—named John, after his father, and called Johnnie for short—began presently to grow up. He was great friends with Tina, the daughter of the whitesmith, who lived nearly opposite. She was a dear little girl, with yellow pigtails and blue eyes, and she was never tired of hearing the story of how Johnnie, when he was a baby, had been minded by a real dragon.

The two children used to go together to peep through the iron grating at the dragon, and sometimes they would hear him mew piteously. And

"THE DRAGON BEHAVED LIKE A SMELTING WORKS."

they would light a halfpennyworth of coloured fire to look at him by. And they grew older and wiser.

Now, at last one day the mayor and corporation, hunting the hare in their gold gowns, came screaming back to the town gates with the news that a lame, humpy giant, as big as a tin church, was coming over the marshes towards the town.

"We're lost," said the mayor. "I'd give a thousand pounds to anyone who could keep that giant out of the town. *I* know what he eats—by his teeth."

No one seemed to know what to do. But Johnnie and Tina were listening, and they looked at each other, and then ran off as fast as their boots would carry them.

They ran through the forge, and down the dungeon steps, and knocked at the iron door.

"Who's there?" said the dragon.

"It's only us," said the children.

And the dragon was so dull from having been alone for ten years that he said—

"Come in, dears."

"You won't hurt us, or breathe fire at us or anything?" asked Tina.

And the dragon said, "Not for worlds."

So they went in and talked to him, and told him what the weather was like outside, and what there was in the papers, and at last Johnnie said—

"There's a lame giant in the town. He wants you."

"Does he?" said the dragon, showing his teeth. "If only I were out of this!"

"If we let you loose you might manage to run away before he could catch you."

"Yes, I *might*," answered the dragon, "but then again I mightn't."

"Why—you'd never fight him?" said Tina.

"No," said the dragon, "I'm all for peace, I am. You let me out, and you'll see."

So the children loosed the dragon from the chains and the collar, and he broke down one end of the dungeon and went out—only pausing at the forge door to get the blacksmith to rivet his wing.

He met the lame giant at the gate of the town, and the giant banged on the dragon with his club as if he were banging an iron foundry, and the dragon behaved like a smelting works—all fire and smoke. It was a fearful sight, and people watched it from a distance, falling off their legs with the shock of every bang, but always getting up to look again.

At last the dragon won, and the giant sneaked away across the marshes, and the dragon, who was very tired, went home to sleep, announcing his intention of eating the town in the morning. He went back into his old dungeon because he was a stranger in the town, and he did not know of any other respectable lodging. Then Tina and Johnnie went to the mayor and corporation and said, "The giant is settled. Please give us the thousand pounds reward."

But the mayor said, "No, no, my boy. It is not you who have settled the giant, it is the dragon. I suppose you have chained him up again? When *he* comes to claim the reward he shall have it."

"He isn't chained up yet," said Johnnie. "Shall I send him to claim the reward?"

"ALL THE TOWN CHILDREN BROUGHT THEIR BREAD AND MILK"

But the mayor said he need not trouble, and now he offered a thousand pounds to anyone who would get the dragon chained up again.

"I don't trust you," said Johnnie. "Look how you treated my father when he chained up the dragon."

But the people who were listening at the door interrupted, and said that if Johnnie could fasten up the dragon again they would turn out the mayor and let Johnnie be mayor in his place. For they had been dissatisfied with the mayor for some time, and thought they would like a change.

So Johnnie said, "Done," and off he went, hand-in-hand with Tina, and they called on all their little friends and said—

"Will you help us to save the town?"

And all the children said, "Yes, of course we will. What fun!"

"Well, then," said Tina, "you must all bring your basins of bread and milk to the forge to-morrow at breakfast time."

"And if ever I am mayor," said Johnnie, "I will give a banquet, and you shall be invited. And we'll have nothing but sweet things from beginning to end."

All the children promised, and next morning Tina and Johnny rolled the big washing-tub down the winding stair.

"What's that noise?" asked the dragon.

"It's only a big giant breathing," said Tina; "he's gone by now."

Then, when all the town children brought their bread and milk, Tina emptied it into the wash-tub, and when the tub was full Tina knocked at the iron door with the grating in it, and said—

"May we come in?"

"Oh, yes," said the dragon; "it's very dull here."

So they went in, and with the help of nine other children they lifted the washing-tub in and set it down by the dragon. Then all the other children went away, and Tina and Johnnie sat down and cried.

"What's this?" asked the dragon, "and what's the matter?"

"*This* is bread and milk," said Johnnie, "it's our breakfast—all of it."

"Well," said the dragon, "I don't see what you want with breakfast. I'm going to eat every one in the town as soon as I've rested a little."

"Dear Mr. Dragon," said Tina, "I wish you wouldn't eat us. How would you like to be eaten yourself?"

"Not at all," the dragon confessed, "but nobody will eat me."

"I don't know," said Johnnie, "there's a giant——"

"I know. I fought with him, and licked him——"

"Yes, but there's another come now—the one you fought was only this one's little boy. This one is half as big again."

"He's seven times as big," said Tina.

"No, nine times," said Johnnie. "He's bigger than the steeple."

"Oh, dear," said the dragon. "I never expected this."

"And the mayor has told him where you are," Tina went on, "and he is coming to eat you as soon as he has sharpened his big knife. The mayor told him you were a wild dragon—but he didn't mind. He said he only ate wild dragons—with bread sauce."

"That's tiresome," said the dragon, "and I suppose this sloppy stuff in the tub is the bread sauce?"

The children said it was. "Of course," they added, "bread sauce is only served with wild dragons. Tame ones are served with apple sauce and onion stuffing. What a pity you're not a tame one. he'd never look at you then," they said. "Good-bye, poor dragon, we shall never see you again, and now you'll know what it's like to be eaten." And they began to cry again.

"Well, but look here," said the dragon, "couldn't you pretend I was a tame dragon? Tell the giant that I'm just a poor little, timid tame dragon that you kept for a pet."

"He'd never believe it," said Johnnie. "If you were our tame dragon we should keep you tied up, you know. We shouldn't like to risk losing such a dear, pretty pet."

Then the dragon begged them to fasten him up at once, and they did so with the collar and chains that were made years ago—in the days when men sang over their work and made it strong enough to bear any strain.

And then they went away and told the people what they had done, and Johnnie was made mayor, and had a glorious feast exactly as he had said he would—with nothing in it but sweet things. It began with Turkish delight and halfpenny buns, and went on with oranges, toffee, cocoanut-ice, peppermints, jam puffs, raspberry noyeau, ice-creams, and meringues, and ended with bull's-eyes and ginger-bread and acid-drops.

This was all very well for Johnnie and Tina; but if you are kind children with feeling hearts you will perhaps feel sorry for the poor deceived, deluded dragon—chained up in the dull dungeon, with nothing to do but to think over the shocking untruths that Johnnie had told him.

When he thought how he had been tricked the poor captive dragon began to weep—and the large tears fell down over his rusty plates. And presently he began to feel faint, as people sometimes do when they have been crying, especially if they have not had anything to eat for ten years or so.

And then the poor creature dried his eyes and looked about him, and there he saw the tub of bread and milk. So he thought, "If giants like this damp, white stuff, perhaps *I* should like it too," and he tasted a little, and liked it so much that he ate it all up.

And the next time the tourists came, and Johnnie let off the coloured fire, the dragon said, shyly—

"Excuse my troubling you, but could you bring me a little more bread and milk?"

So Johnnie arranged that people should go round with carts every day to collect the children's bread and milk for the dragon. The children were fed at the town's expense—on whatever they liked, and they ate nothing but cake and buns and sweet things, and they said the poor dragon was very welcome to their bread and milk.

Now, when Johnnie had been mayor ten years or so he married Tina, and on their wedding morning they went to see the dragon. He had grown quite tame, and his rusty plates had fallen off in places, and underneath he was soft and furry to stroke. So now they stroked him.

And he said, "I don't know how I could ever have liked eating anything but bread and milk. I *am* a tame dragon, now, aren't I?" And when they said "Yes, he was," the dragon said—

"I am so tame, won't you undo me?" And some people would have been afraid to

trust him, but Johnnie and Tina were so happy on their wedding day that they could not believe any harm of anyone in the world. So they loosed the chains, and the dragon said, "Excuse me a moment, there are one or two little things I should like to fetch," and he moved off to those mysterious steps and went down them, out of sight into the darkness. And as he moved more and more of his rusty plates fell off.

In a few minutes they heard him clanking up the steps. He brought something in his mouth—it was a bag of gold.

"It's no good to me," he said; "perhaps you might find it come in useful." So they thanked him very kindly.

"More where that came from," said he, and fetched more and more and more, till they told him to stop. So now they were rich, and so were their fathers and mothers. Indeed, everyone was rich, and there were no more poor people in the town. And they all got rich without working, which is very wrong; but the dragon had never been to school, as you have, so he knew no better.

And as the dragon came out of the dungeon, following Johnnie and Tina into the bright gold and blue of their wedding day, he blinked his eyes as a cat does in the sunshine, and he shook himself, and the last of his plates dropped off, and his wings with them, and he was just like a very, very extra-sized cat. And from that day he grew further and further, and he was the beginning of all cats. Nothing of the dragon remained except the claws, which all cats have still, as you can easily ascertain.

And I hope you see now how important it is to feed your cat with bread and milk. If you were to let it have nothing to eat but mice and birds it might grow larger and fiercer, and scalier and tailier, and get wings and turn into the beginning of dragons. And then there would be all the bother over again.

"FOUR KNIVES WERE AT WORK RIPPING AND SLASHING IN ALL DIRECTIONS."

(See page 250.)

THE STRAND MAGAZINE.

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*The Purple Terror.**

By Fred M. White.

I.

LIEUTENANT WILL SCARLETT'S instructions were devoid of problems, physical or otherwise. To convey a letter from Captain Driver of the *Yankee Doodle*, in Porto Rico Bay, to Admiral Lake on the other side of the isthmus, was an apparently simple matter.

"All you have to do," the captain remarked, "is to take three or four men with you in case of accidents, cross the isthmus on foot, and simply give this letter into the hands of Admiral Lake. By so doing we shall save at least four days, and the aborigines are presumedly friendly."

The aborigines aforesaid were Cuban insurgents. Little or no strife had taken place along the neck lying between Porto Rico and the north bay where Lake's flagship lay, though the belt was known to be given over to the disaffected Cubans.

"It is a matter of fifty miles through practically unexplored country," Scarlett replied, "and there's a good deal of the family quarrel in this business, sir. If the Spaniards hate us, the Cubans are not exactly enamoured of our flag."

Captain Driver roundly denounced the whole pack of them.

"Treacherous thieves to a man," he said. "I don't suppose your progress will have any brass bands and floral arches to it. And they tell me the forest is pretty thick. But you'll get there all the same. There is the letter, and you can start as soon as you like."

"I may pick my own men, sir?"

"My dear fellow, take whom you please. Take the mastiff, if you like."

"I'd like the mastiff," Scarlett replied, "as he is practically my own, I thought you would not object."

Will Scarlett began to glow as the prospect of adventure stimulated his imagination. He was rather a good specimen of West Point naval dandyism. He had brains at the back of his smartness, and his geological and botanical knowledge were going to prove of considerable service to a grateful country when said grateful country should have passed beyond the rudimentary stages of colonization. And there was some disposition to envy Scarlett on the part of others floating for the past month on the liquid prison of the sapphire sea.

A warrant officer, Tarrer by name, *plus* two A B's of thews and sinews, to say nothing of the dog, completed the exploring party. By the time that the sun kissed the tip of the feathery hills they had covered some six miles of their journey. From the first Scarlett had been struck by the absolute absence of the desolation and horror of civil strife. Evidently the fiery cross had not been carried here; huts and houses were intact, the villagers stood under sloping eaves, and regarded the Americans with a certain sullen curiosity.

"We'd better stop for the night here," said Scarlett.

They had come at length to a village that boasted some pretensions. An adobe chapel at one end of the straggling street was faced by a wine-house at the other. A padre, with hands folded over a bulbous, greasy gabardine, bowed gravely to Scarlett's salutation. The latter had what Tarrer called "considerable Spanish."

"We seek quarters for the night," said Scarlett. "Of course, we are prepared to pay for them."

The sleepy padre nodded towards the wine-house.

"You will find fair accommodation there," he said. "We are friends of the Americanos."

Scarlett doubted the fact, and passed on with florid thanks. So far, little signs of friendliness had been encountered on the march. Coldness, suspicion, a suggestion of fear, but no friendliness to be embarrassing

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The keeper of the wine-shop had his doubts. He feared his poor accommodation for guests so distinguished. A score or more of picturesque, cut-throat-looking rascals with cigarettes in their mouths lounged sullenly in the bar. The display of a brace of gold dollars enlarged mine host's opinion of his household capacity.

"I will do my best, señors," he said. "Come this way."

So it came to pass that an hour after twilight Tarrer and Scarlett were seated in the open amongst the oleanders and the trailing gleam of the fire-flies, discussing cigars of average merit and a native wine that was not without virtues. The long bar of the wine-house was brilliantly illuminated; from within came shouts of laughter mingled with the ting, tang of the guitar and the rollicking clack of the castanets.

"They seem to be happy in there," Tarrer remarked. "It isn't all daggers and bull in this distressful country."

A certain curiosity came over Scarlett.

"It is the duty of a good officer," he said, "to lose no opportunity of acquiring useful information. Let us join the giddy throng, Tarrer."

Tarrer expressed himself with enthusiasm in favour of any amusement that might be going. A month's idleness on shipboard increases the appetite for that kind of thing wonderfully. The long bar was comfortable, and filled with Cubans who took absolutely no notice of the intruders. Their eyes were turned towards a rude stage at the far end of the bar, whereon a girl was gyrating in a dance with a celerity and grace that caused the wreath of flowers around her shoulders to resemble a trembling zone of purple flame.

"A wonderfully pretty girl and a wonderfully pretty dance," Scarlett murmured, when the motions ceased and the girl leapt gracefully to the ground. "Largesse, I expect. I thought so. Well, I'm good for a quarter."

The girl came forward, extending a shell prettily. She curtsied before Scarlett and fixed her dark, liquid eyes on his. As he smiled and dropped his quarter-dollar into the shell a coquettish gleam came into the velvety eyes. An ominous growl came from the lips of a bearded ruffian close by.

"Othello's jealous," said Tarrer. "Look at his face."

"I am better employed," Scarlett laughed. "That was a graceful dance, pretty one. I hope you are going to give us another one presently——"

Scarlett paused suddenly. His eyes had fallen on the purple band of flowers the girl had twined round her shoulder. Scarlett was an enthusiastic botanist, he knew most of the gems in Flora's crown, but he had never looked upon such a vivid wealth of blossom before.

The flowers were orchids, and orchids of a kind unknown to collectors anywhere. On this point Scarlett felt certain. And yet this part of the world was by no means a difficult one to explore in comparison with New Guinea and Sumatra, where the rarer varieties had their homes.

The blooms were immensely large, far larger than any flower of the kind known to Europe or America, of a deep pure purple, with a blood-red centre. As Scarlett gazed upon them he noticed a certain cruel expression on the flower. Most orchids have a kind of face of their own, the purple blooms had a positive expression of ferocity and cunning. They exhumed, too, a queer, sickly fragrance. Scarlett had smelt something like it before, after the Battle of Manila. The perfume was the perfume of a corpse.

"And yet they are magnificent flowers," said Scarlett. "Won't you tell me where you got them from, pretty one?"

"THE GIRL CAME FORWARD, EXTENDING A SHELL PRETTILY"

The girl was evidently flattered by the attention bestowed upon her by the smart young American. The bearded Othello alluded to edged up to her side.

"The señor had best leave the girl alone," he said, insolently.

Scarlett's fist clenched as he measured the Cuban with his eyes. The Admiral's letter crackled in his breast-pocket, and discretion got the best of valour.

"You are paying yourself a poor compliment, my good fellow," he said, "though I certainly admire your good taste. Those flowers interested me."

The man appeared to be mollified. His features corrugated in a smile.

"The señor would like some of those blooms?" he asked. "It was I who procured them for little Zara here. I can show you where they grow."

Every eye in the room was turned in Scarlett's direction. It seemed to him that a kind of diabolical malice glistened on every dark face there, save that of the girl, whose features paled under her healthy tan.

"If the señor is wise," she began, "he will not ——"

"Listen to the tales of a silly girl," Othello put in, menacingly. He grasped the girl by the arm, and she winced in positive pain. "Pshaw, there is no barm where the flowers grow, if one is only careful. I will take you there, and I will be your guide to Port Anna, where you are going, for a gold dollar."

All Scarlett's scientific enthusiasm was aroused. It is not given to every man to present a new orchid to the horticultural world. And this one would dwarf the finest plant hitherto discovered.

"Done with you," he said; "we start at daybreak. I shall look to you to be ready. Your name is Tito? Well, good-night, Tito."

As Scarlett and Tarrer withdrew the girl suddenly darted forward. A wild word or two fluttered from her lips. Then there was a sound as of a blow, followed by a little, stifled cry of pain.

"No, no," Tarrer urged, as Scarlett half turned. "Better not. They are ten to one, and they are no friends of ours. It never pays to interfere in these family quarrels. I daresay, if you interfered, the girl would be just as ready to knife you as her jealous lover."

"But a blow like that, Tarrer!"

"It's a pity, but I don't see how we can help it. Your business is the quick dispatch of the Admiral's letter, not the squiring of dames."

Scarlett owned with a sigh that Tarrer was right.

II.

It was quite a different Tito who presented himself at daybreak the following morning. His insolent manner had disappeared. He was cheerful, alert, and he had a manner full of the most winning politeness.

"You quite understand what we want," Scarlett said. "My desire is to reach Port Anna as soon as possible. You know the way?"

"Every inch of it, señor. I have made the journey scores of times. And I shall have the felicity of getting you there early on the third day from now."

"Is it so far as that?"

"The distance is not great, señor. It is the passage through the woods. There are parts where no white man has been before."

"And you will not forget the purple orchids?"

A queer gleam trembled like summer lightning in Tito's eyes. The next instant it had gone. A time was to come when Scarlett was to recall that look, but for the moment it was allowed to pass.

"The señor shall see the purple orchid," he said; "thousands of them. They have a bad name amongst our people, but that is all nonsense. They grow in the high trees, and their blossoms cling to long, green tendrils. These tendrils are poisonous to the flesh, and great care should be taken in handling them. And the flowers are quite harmless, though we call them the devil's poppies."

To all of this Scarlett listened eagerly. He was all-impatient to see and handle the mysterious flower for himself. The whole excursion was going to prove a wonderful piece of luck. At the same time he had to curb his impatience. There would be no chance of seeing the purple orchid to-day.

For hours they fought their way along through the dense tangle. A heat seemed to lie over all the land like a curse—a blistering, sweltering, moist heat with no puff of wind to temper its breathlessness. By the time that the sun was sliding down, most of the party had had enough of it.

They passed out of the underwood at length, and, striking upwards, approached a clump of huge forest trees on the brow of a ridge. All kinds of parasites hung from the branches, there were ropes and bands of green, and high up a fringe of purple glory

that caused Scarlett's pulses to leap a little faster.

"Surely that is the purple orchid?" he cried.

Tito shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"A mere straggler or two," he said, "and out of our reach in any case. The señor will have all he wants and more to-morrow."

"But it seems to me," said Scarlett, "that I could——"

Then he paused. The sun like a great glowing shield was shining full behind the tree with its crown of purple, and showing up every green rope and thread clinging to the branches with the clearness of liquid crystal. Scarlett saw a network of green cords like a huge spider's web, and in the centre of it was not a fly, but a human skeleton!

The arms and legs were stretched apart as if the victim had been crucified. The wrists and ankles were bound in the cruel web. Fragments of tattered clothing fluttered in the faint breath of the evening breeze.

"Horrible," Scarlett cried, "absolutely horrible!"

"You may well say that," Tarrer exclaimed, with a shudder. "Like the fly in the amber or the apple in the dumpling, the mystery is how he got there."

"Perhaps Tito can explain the mystery," Scarlett suggested.

Tito appeared to be uneasy and disturbed. He looked furtively from one to the other of his employers as a culprit might who feels he has been found out. But his courage returned as he noted the absence of suspicion in the faces turned upon him.

"I can explain," he exclaimed, with teeth that chattered from some unknown terror or guilt. "It is not the first time that I have seen the skeleton. Some plant-hunter doubtless who came here alone. He climbed into the tree without a knife, and those green ropes got twisted round his limbs, as a swimmer gets entangled in the weeds. The more he struggled, the more the cords bound him. He would call in vain for anyone to assist him here. And so he must have died."

IN THE CENTRE WAS NOT A FLY, BUT A HUMAN SKELETON.

The explanation was a plausible one, but by no means detracted from the horror of the discovery. For some time the party pushed their way on in the twilight, till the darkness descended suddenly like a curtain.

"We will camp here," Tito said, "it is high, dry ground, and we have this belt of trees above us. There is no better place than this for miles around. In the valley the miasma is dangerous."

As Tito spoke he struck a match, and soon a torch flamed up. The little party were on a small plateau, fringed by trees. The ground was dry and hard, and, as Scarlett and his party saw to their astonishment, littered with bones. There were skulls of animals and skulls of human beings, the skeletons of birds, the frames of beasts both great and small. It was a weird, shuddering sight.

"We can't possibly stay here," Scarlett exclaimed.

Tito shrugged his shoulders.

"There is nowhere else," he replied. "Down in the valley there are many dangers. Further in the woods are the snakes and jaguars. Bones are nothing. Peuf, they can be easily cleared away."

They had to be cleared away, and there was an end of the matter. For the most part the skeletons were white and dry as air and sun could make them. Over the dry, calcined mass the huge fringe of trees nodded mournfully. With the rest, Scarlett was busy scattering the mocking frames aside. A perfect human skeleton lay at his feet. On one finger something glittered—a signet ring. As Scarlett took it in his hand he started.

"I know this ring!" he exclaimed; "it belonged to Pierre Anton, perhaps the most skilled and intrepid plant-hunter the *Jardin des Plantes* ever employed. The poor fellow was by way of being a friend of mine. He met the fate that he always anticipated."

"There must have been a rare holocaust here," said Tarrer.

"It beats me," Scarlett responded. By this time a large circle had been shifted clear of human and other remains. By the light of the fire loathsome insects could be seen scudding and straddling away. "It beats me entirely. Tito, can you offer any explanation? If the bones were all human I could get some grip of the problem. But when one comes to birds and animals as well! Do you see that the skeletons lie in a perfect circle, starting from the centre of the clump of trees above us? What does it mean?"

Tito professed utter ignorance of the subject. Some years before a small tribe of natives invaded the peninsula for religious rites. They came from a long way off in canoes, and wild stories were told concerning them. They burnt sacrifices, no doubt.

Scarlett turned his back contemptuously on this transparent tale. His curiosity was aroused. There must be some explanation, for Pierre Anton had been seen of men within the last ten years.

"There's something uncanny about this," he said, to Tarrer. "I mean to get to the bottom of it, or know why."

"As for me," said Tarrer, with a cavernous yawn, "I have but one ambition, and that is my supper, followed by my bed."

III.

SCARLETT lay in the light of the fire looking about him. He felt restless and uneasy, though he would have found it difficult to explain the reason. For one thing, the air trembled to strange noises. There seemed to be something moving, writhing in the forest trees above his head. More than once it seemed to his distorted fancy that he could

"A RARE HOLOCAUST"

see a squirming knot of green snakes in motion.

Outside the circle, in a grotto of bones, Tito lay sleeping. A few moments before his dark, sleek head had been furtively raised, and his eyes seemed to gleam in the flickering firelight with malignant cunning. As he met Scarlett's glance he gave a deprecatory gesture and subsided.

"What the deuce does it all mean?" Scarlett muttered. "I feel certain yonder

rascal is up to some mischief. Jealous still because I paid his girl a little attention. But he can't do us any real harm. Quiet, there!"

The big mastiff growled and then whined uneasily. Even the dog seemed to be conscious of some unseen danger. He lay down again, cowed by the stern command, but he still whimpered in his dreams.

"I fancy I'll keep awake for a spell," Scarlett told himself.

For a time he did so. Presently he began to slide away into the land of poppies. He was walking amongst a garden of bones which bore masses of purple blossoms. Then Pierre Anton came on the scene, pale and resolute as Scarlett had always known him; then the big mastiff seemed in some way to be mixed up with the phantasm of the dream, barking as if in pain, and Scarlett came to his senses.

He was breathing short, a beady perspiration stood on his forehead, his heart hammered in quick thuds—all the horrors of nightmare were still upon him. In a vague way as yet he heard the mastiff howl, a real howl of real terror, and Scarlett knew that he was awake.

Then a strange thing happened. In the none too certain light of the fire, Scarlett saw the mastiff snatched up by some invisible hand, carried far on high towards the trees, and finally flung to the earth with a crash. The big dog lay still as a log.

A sense of fear born of the knowledge of impotence came over Scarlett. What in the name of evil did it all mean? The smart scientist had no faith in the occult, and yet what *did* it all mean?

Nobody stirred. Scarlett's companions were soaked and soddened with fatigue; the rolling thunder of artillery would have scarce disturbed them. With teeth set and limbs that trembled, Scarlett crawled over to the dog.

The great, black muzzled creature was quite dead. The full chest was stained and soaked in blood, the throat had been cut apparently with some jagged, saw-like instrument away to the bone. And, strangest thing of all, scattered all about the body was a score or more of the great purple orchid flowers broken off close to the head. A hot, pricking sensation travelled slowly up Scarlett's spine and seemed to pass out at the tip of his skull. He felt his hair rising.

He was frightened. As a matter of honest fact, he had never been so horribly scared in his life before. The whole thing was so mysterious, so cruel, so bloodthirsty.

Still, there must be some rational explanation. In some way the matter had to do with the purple orchid. The flower had an evil reputation. Was it not known to these Cubans as the devil's poppy?

Scarlett recollected vividly now Zara's white, scared face when Tito had volunteered to show the way to the resplendent bloom; he remembered the cry of the girl and the blow that followed. He could see it all now. The girl had meant to warn him against some nameless horror to which Tito was leading the small party. This was the jealous Cuban's revenge.

A wild desire to pay this debt to the uttermost fraction filled Scarlett, and shook him with a trembling passion. He crept along in the drenching dew to where Tito lay, and touched his forehead with the chill blue rim of a revolver barrel. Tito stirred slightly.

"You dog!" Scarlett cried. "I am going to shoot you."

Tito did not move again. His breathing was soft and regular. Beyond a doubt the man was sleeping peacefully. After all he might be innocent, and yet, on the other hand, he might be so sure of his quarry that he could afford to slumber without anxiety as to his vengeance.

In favour of the latter theory was the fact that the Cuban lay beyond the limit of what had previously been the circle of dry bones. It was just possible that there was no danger outside that pale. In that case it would be easy to arouse the rest, and so save them from the horrible death which had befallen the mastiff. No doubt these were a form of upas tree, but that would not account for the ghastly spectacle in mid-air.

"I'll let this chap sleep for the present," Scarlett muttered.

He crawled back, not without misgivings, into the ring of death. He meant to wake the others and then wait for further developments. By now his senses were more alert and vigorous than they had ever been before. A preternatural clearness of brain and vision possessed him. As he advanced he saw suddenly falling a green bunch of cord that straightened into a long, emerald line. It was triangular in shape, fine at the apex, and furnished with hooked spines. The rope appeared to dangle from the tree overhead, the broad, sucker-like termination was evidently soaking up moisture.

A natural phenomenon evidently, Scarlett thought. This was some plant new to him, a parasite living amongst the tree-tops and drawing life and vigour by means of these

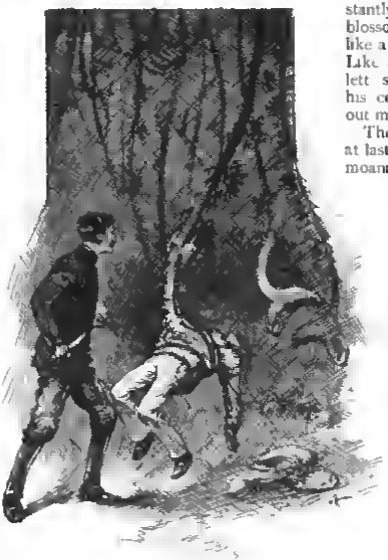
green, rope like antennæ designed by Nature to soak and absorb the heavy dews of night.

For a moment the logic of this theory was soothing to Scarlett's distracted nerves, but only for a moment, for then he saw at regular intervals along the green rope the big purple blossoms of the devil's poppy.

He stood gasping there, utterly taken aback for the moment. There must be some infernal juggling behind all this business. He saw the rope slacken and quiver, he saw it swing forward like a pendulum, and the next minute it had passed across the shoulders of a sleeping seaman.

Then the green root became as the arm of an octopus. The line shook from end to end like the web of an angry spider when invaded by a wasp. It seemed to grip the sailor and tighten, and then, before Scarlett's affrighted eyes, the sleeping man was raised gently from the ground.

Scarlett jumped forward with a desire to scream hysterically. Now that a comrade was in danger he was no longer afraid. He whipped a jack knife from his pocket and slashed at the cruel cord. He half expected to meet with the stoutness of a steel strand, but to his surprise the feeler snapped like a carrot, bumping the sailor heavily on the ground.



"THE SLEEPING MAN WAS RAISED GENTLY FROM THE GROUND."

He sat up, rubbing his eyes vigorously.

"That you, sir?" he asked. "What is the matter?"

"For the love of God, get up at once and help me to arouse the others," Scarlett said, hoarsely. "We have come across the devil's workshop. All the horrors of the inferno are invented here."

The bluejacket struggled to his feet. As he did so, the clothing from his waist downwards slipped about his feet, clean cut through by the teeth of the green parasite. All around the body of the sailor blood oozed from a zone of teeth-marks.

Two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage is a virtue vouchsafed to few. The tar, who would have faced an ironclad cheerfully, fairly shivered with fright and dismay.

"What does it mean, sir?" he cried. "I've been——"

"Wake the others," Scarlett screamed; "wake the others."

Two or three more green tangles of rope came tumbling to the ground, straightening and quivering instantly. The purple blossoms stood out like a frill upon them. Like a madman Scarlett shouted, kicking his companions without mercy.

They were all awake at last, grumbling and moaning for their lost slumbers. All this time Tito had never stirred.

"I don't understand it at all," said Tarrer.

"Come from under those trees," said Scarlett, "and I will endeavour to explain. Not that you will believe me for a moment. No man can be expected to believe the awful nightmare I am going to tell you."

Scarlett proceeded to explain. As he expected, his story was followed with marked incredulity, save by the wounded sailor, who had strong evidence to stimulate his otherwise defective imagination.

"I can't believe it," Tarrer said, at length. They were whispering together beyond earshot of Tito, whom they had no desire to arouse for obvious reasons. "This is some diabolical juggling of yonder rascally Cuban. It seems impossible that those slender green cords could——"

Scarlett pointed to the centre of the circle.

"Call the dog," he said, grimly, "and see if he will come."

"I admit the point as far as the poor old mastiff is concerned. But at the same time I don't—however, I'll see for myself."

By this time a dozen or more of the slender cords were hanging pendent from the trees. They moved from spot to spot as if jerked up by some unseen hand and deposited a foot or two farther. With the great purple bloom fringing the stem, the effect was not unlovely save to Scarlett, who could see only the dark side of it. As Tarrer spoke he advanced in the direction of the trees.

"What are you going to do?" Scarlett asked.

"Exactly what I told you. I am going to investigate this business for myself."

Without wasting further words Scarlett sprang forward. It was no time for the niceties of an effete civilization. Force was the only logical argument to be used in a case like this, and Scarlett was the more powerful man of the two.

Tarrer saw and appreciated the situation.

"No, no," he cried, "none of that. Anyway, you're too late."

He darted forward and threaded his way between the slender emerald columns. As they moved slowly and with a certain stately deliberation there was no great danger to an alert and vigorous individual. As Scarlett entered the avenue he could hear the soak and suck as the dew was absorbed.

"For Heaven's sake, come out of it," he cried.

The warning came too late. A whip-like trail of green touched Tarrer from behind, and in a lightning flash he was in the toils. The tendency to draw up anything and everything gave the cords a terrible power. Tarrer evidently felt it, for his breath came in great gasps.

"Cut me free," he said, hoarsely; "cut me free. I am being carried off my feet."

He seemed to be doomed for a moment, for all the cords there were apparently converging in his direction. This, as a matter of fact, was a solution of the whole sickening, horrible sensation. Pulled here and there, thrust in one direction and another, Tarrer contrived to keep his feet.

Heedless of possible danger to himself Scarlett darted forward, calling to his companions to come to the rescue. In less time than it takes to tell, four knives were at work ripping and slashing in all directions.

"Not all of you," Scarlett whispered. So tense was the situation that no voice was raised above a murmur. "You two keep your eyes open for fresh cords, and cut them as they fall, instantly. Now then."

The horrible green spines were round Tarrer's body like snakes. His face was white, his breath came painfully, for the pressure was terrible. It seemed to Scarlett to be one horrible dissolving view of green, slimy cords and great weltering, purple blossoms. The whole of the circle was strewn with them. They were wet and slimy underfoot.

Tarrer had fallen forward half unconscious. He was supported now by but two cords above his head. The cruel pressure had been relieved. With one savage sweep of his knife Scarlett cut the last of the lines, and Tarrer fell like a log unconscious to the ground. A feeling of nausea, a yellow dizziness, came over Scarlett as he staggered beyond the dread circle. He saw Tarrer carried to a place of safety, and then the world seemed to wither and leave him in the dark.

"I feel a bit groggy and weak," said Tarrer an hour or so later; "but beyond that this idiot of a Richard is himself again. So far as I am concerned, I should like to get even with our friend Tito for this."

"Something with boiling oil in it," Scarlett suggested, grimly. "The callous scoundrel has slept soundly through the whole of this business. I suppose he felt absolutely certain that he had finished with us."

"Upon my word, we ought to shoot the beggar!" Tarrer exclaimed.

"I have a little plan of my own," said Scarlett, "which I am going to put in force later on. Meanwhile we had better get on with breakfast. When Tito wakes a pleasant little surprise will await him."

Tito roused from his slumbers in due course and looked around him. His glance was curious, disappointed, then full of a white and yellow fear. A thousand conflicting emotions streamed across his dark face. Scarlett read them at a glance as he called the Cuban over to him.

"I am not going into any unnecessary details with you," he said. "It has come to my knowledge that you are playing traitor to us. Therefore we prefer to complete our journey alone. We can easily find the way now."

"The señor may do as he pleases," he replied. "Give me my dollar and let me go."

Scarlett replied grimly that he had no

intention of doing anything of the kind. He did not propose to place the lives of himself and his comrades in the power of a rascally Cuban who had played false.

"We are going to leave you here till we return," he said. "You will have plenty of food, you will be perfectly safe under the shelter of these trees, and there is no chance of anybody disturbing you. We are going to tie you up to one of these trees for the next four and-twenty hours."

All the insolence died out of Tito's face. His knees bowed, a cold dew came out over the ghastly green of his features. From the shaking of his limbs he might have fared disastrously with ague.

"The trees," he stammered, "the trees, señor! There is danger from snakes, and—and from many things. There are other places——"

"If this place was safe last night it is safe to-day," Scarlett said, grimly. "I have quite made up my mind."

Tito fought no longer. He fell forward on his knees, he howled for mercy, till Scarlett fairly kicked him up again.

"Make a clean breast of it," he said, "or take the consequences. You know perfectly well that we have found you out, scoundrel."

Tito's story came in gasps. He wanted to get rid of the Americans. He was jealous. Besides, under the Americanos would Cuba be any better off? By no means and assuredly not. Therefore it was the duty of every good Cuban to destroy the Americanos where possible.

"A nice lot to fight for," Scarlett muttered. "Get to the point."

Hastened to the point by a liberal application of stout shoe-leather, Tito made plenary confession. The señor himself had suggested death by medium of the devil's poppies. More than one predatory plant-hunter had been lured to his destruction in the same way. The skeleton hung on the tree was a Dutchman who had walked into the clutch of the purple terror innocently. And Pierre Anton had done the same. The suckers of the devil's poppy only came down at night to gather moisture; in the day they were coiled up like a spring. And anything that they touched they killed. Tito had watched more than one bird or small beast crushed and mangled by these cruel spines with their fringe of purple blossoms.

"How do you get the blooms?" Scarlett asked.

"That is easy," Tito replied. "In the daytime I moisten the ground under the trees. Then the suckers unfold, drawn by the water. Once the suckers unfold one cuts several of them off with long knives.

"HE HOWLED FOR MERCY."

There is danger, of course, but not if one is careful."

"I'll not trouble the devil's poppy any further at present," said Scarlett, "but I shall trouble you to accompany me to my destination as a prisoner."

Tito's eyes dilated.

"They will not shoot me?" he asked, hoarsely.

"I don't know," Scarlett replied. "They may hang you instead. At any rate, I shall be bitterly disappointed if they don't end you one way or the other. Whichever operation it is, I can look forward to it with perfect equanimity."

THE SEVEN DRAGONS.

VII.

By E. Nesbit

THE little white Princess always woke in her little white bed when the starlings began to chatter in the pearl-grey morning. As soon as the woods were awake, she used to run up the twisting turret-stairs with her little bare feet, and stand on the top of the tower in her white bed-gown, and kiss her hands to the sun and to the woods and to the sleeping town, and say: "Good morning, pretty world!"

Then she would run down the cold stone steps and dress herself in her short skirt and her cap and apron, and begin the day's work. She swept the rooms and made the breakfast, she washed the dishes and she scoured the pans, and all this she did because she was a real Princess. For of all who should have served her, only one remained faithful—her old nurse, who had lived with her in the tower all the Princess's life. And, now the nurse was old and feeble, the Princess would not let her work any more, but did all the housework herself, while nurse sat still and did the sewing, because this was a real Princess with a skin like milk, and hair like flax and a heart like gold.

Her name was Sabrinetta, and her grandmother was Sabra, who married St. George after he had killed the dragon, and by real rights all the country belonged to her: the woods that stretched away to the mountains, and the downs that sloped down to the sea, and the pretty fields of corn and maize and rye, the olive orchards and the vineyards, and the little town itself with its towers and its turrets, its steep roofs and strange windows, that nestled in the hollow between the sea where the whirlpool was and the mountains, white with snow and rosy with sunrise.

But when her father and mother died, leaving her cousin to take care of the kingdom till she grew up, he, being a very evil Prince, had taken everything away from her, and all the people had followed him, and now nothing was left her of all her possessions except the great dragon-proof tower that her grandfather, St. George, had built, and of all who should have been her servants only the good nurse.

And this was why Sabrinetta was the first person in all the land to get a glimpse of the wonder.

Early, early, early, while all the townspeople were fast asleep, she ran up the turret-steps and looked out over the field, and at the other side of the field there is a green-ferny ditch and a rose-thorny hedge, and then comes the wood. And as Sabrinetta stood on her tower she saw a shaking and a twisting of the rose-thorny hedge, and then something very bright and shining wriggled out through it into the ferny ditch and back again. It only came out for a minute, but she saw it quite plainly, and she said to herself:—

"Dear me, what a curious, shiny, bright-looking creature! If it were bigger, and if I didn't know that they have been fabulous monsters for quite a long time now, I should almost think it was a dragon."

The thing, whatever it was, did look rather like a dragon—but then it was too small, and it looked rather like a lizard—only then it was too big. It was about as long as a hearthrug.

"I wish it had not been in such a hurry to get back into the wood," said Sabrinetta. "Of course, it's quite safe for me, in my dragon proof tower, but if it *is* a dragon, it's quite big enough to eat people, and to-day's the first of May, and the children go out to get flowers in the wood."

When Sabrinetta had done the housework (she did not leave so much as a speck of dust anywhere, even in the corneriest corner of the winding stair) she put on her milk-white silky gown with the moon-daisies worked on it, and went up to the top of her tower again.

Across the fields troops of children were going out to gather the may, and the sound of their laughter and singing came up to the top of the tower.

"I do hope it *wasn't* a dragon," said Sabrinetta.

The children went by twos and by threes and by tens and by twenties, and the red and blue and yellow and white of their frocks were scattered on the green of the field.

"It's like a green silk mantle worked with flowers," said the Princess, smiling.

By twos and by threes, by tens and by twenties, the children vanished into the wood, till the mantle of the field was left plain green once more.

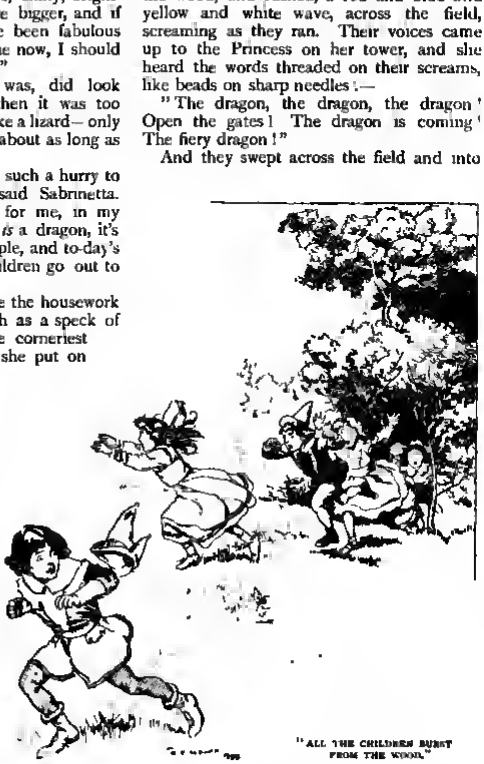
"All the embroidery is unpicked," said the Princess, sighing.

The sun shone, and the sky was blue, and the fields were quite green, and all the flowers were very bright indeed, because it was May Day.

Then quite suddenly a cloud passed over the sun, and the silence was broken by shrieks from afar off, and, like a many-coloured torrent, all the children burst from the wood, and rushed, a red and blue and yellow and white wave, across the field, screaming as they ran. Their voices came up to the Princess on her tower, and she heard the words threaded on their screams, like beads on sharp needles:—

"The dragon, the dragon, the dragon! Open the gates! The dragon is coming! The fiery dragon!"

And they swept across the field and into



"ALL THE CHILDREN BURST FROM THE WOOD."

the gate of the town, and the Princess heard the gate bang, and the children were out of sight—but on the other side of the field the rose-thorns crackled and smashed in the hedge, and something very large and glaring and horrible trampled the ferns in the ditch for one moment before it hid itself again in the covert of the wood.

The Princess went down and told her nurse, and the nurse at once locked the great door of the tower and put the key in her pocket.

"Let them take care of themselves," she said, when the Princess begged to be allowed to go out and help to take care of the children. "My business is to take care of you, my precious, and I'm going to do it. Old as I am, I can turn a key still."

So Sabrinetta went up again to the top of her tower, and cried whenever she thought of the children and the fiery dragon. For she knew, of course, that the gates of the town were not dragon-proof, and that the dragon could just walk in whenever he liked.

The children ran straight to the palace, where the Prince was cracking his hunting-whip down at the kennels, and told him what had happened.

"Good sport," said the Prince, and he ordered out his pack of hippopotamuses at once. It was his custom to hunt big game with hippopotamuses, and people would not have minded that so much—but he would swagger about in the streets of the town with his pack yelping and gambolling at his heels, and, when he did that, the greengrocer, who had his stall in the market-place, always regretted it; and the crockery merchant, who spread his wares on the pavement, was ruined for life every time the Prince chose to show off his pack.

The Prince rode out of the town with his hippopotamuses trotting and frisking behind him, and people got inside their houses as quickly as they could when they heard the voices of his pack and the blowing of his horn. The pack squeezed through the town gates and off across country to hunt the dragon. Few of you who have not seen a pack of hippopotamuses in full cry will be able to imagine at all what the hunt was like. To begin with, hippopotamuses do not bay like hounds: they grunt like pigs, and their grunt is very big and fierce. Then, of course, no one expects hippopotamuses to jump. They just crash through the hedges and lumber through the standing corn, doing serious injury to the crops, and annoying the farmers very much. All the hippopotamuses had collars with their name and address on, but when the farmers called at the palace to complain of the injury to their standing crops, the Prince always said it served them right for leaving their crops standing about in people's way, and he never paid anything at all.

So now, when he and his pack went out, several people in the town whispered, "I wish the dragon would eat *him*"—which was very wrong of them, no doubt, but then he was such a very nasty Prince.

They hunted by field, and they hunted by wold; they drew the woods blank, and the scent didn't lie on the downs at all. The dragon was shy, and would not show himself.

But just as the Prince was beginning to think there was no dragon at all, but only a cock and bull, his favourite old hippopotamus gave tongue. The Prince blew his horn and shouted:—

"Tally ho! Hark forward! Tantivy!"

and the whole pack charged down hill towards the hollow by the wood. For there, plain to be seen, was the dragon, as big as a barge, glowing like a furnace, and spitting fire and showing his shining teeth.

"The hunt is up!" cried the Prince. And, indeed, it was. For the dragon—instead of behaving as a quarry should, and running away—ran straight at the pack, and the Prince on his elephant had the mortification of seeing his prize pack swallowed up one by one in the twinkling of an eye, by the dragon they had come out to hunt. The dragon swallowed all the hippopotamuses just as a dog swallows bits of meat. It was a shocking sight. Of the whole of the pack that had come out sporting so merrily to the music of the horn, now not even a puppy-hippopotamus was left, and the dragon was looking anxiously round to see if he had forgotten anything.

The Prince slipped off his elephant on the other side, and ran into the thickest part of the wood. He hoped the dragon could not break through the bushes there, since they were very strong and close. He went crawling on hands and knees in a most un-Prince-like way, and at last, finding a hollow tree, he crept into it. The wood was very still—no crashing of branches and no smell of burning came to alarm the Prince. He drained the silver hunting-bottle slung from his shoulder, and stretched his legs in the hollow tree. He never shed a single tear for his poor tame hippopotamuses who had eaten from his hand, and followed him faithfully in all the

pleasures of the chase for so many years. For it was a false Prince, with a skin like leather and hair like hearth-brushes, and a heart like a stone. He never shed a tear, but he just went to sleep. When he awoke it was dark. He crept out of the tree and rubbed his eyes. The wood was black about him, but there was a red glow in a dell close by, and it was a fire of sticks, and beside it sat a ragged youth with long, yellow hair; all round lay sleeping forms which breathed heavily.

"Who are you?" said the Prince.

"I'm Elfinn, the pig-keeper," said the ragged youth. "And who are you?"

"I'm Tiresome, the Prince," said the other.

"And what are you doing out of your palace at this time of night?" asked the pig-keeper, severely.

"I've been hunting," said the Prince.

The pig-keeper laughed. "Oh, it was you I saw, then? A good hunt, wasn't it? My pigs and I were looking on."

All the sleeping forms grunted and snored, and the Prince saw that they were pigs—he knew it by their manners.

"If you had known as much as I do," Elfinn went on, "you might have saved your pack."

"What do you mean?" said Tiresome.

"Why, the dragon," said Elfinn. "You went out at the wrong time of day. The dragon should be hunted at *night*."

"No, thank you," said the Prince, with a shudder. "A daylight hunt is quite good enough for me, you silly pig-keeper."

"Oh, well," said Elfinn, "do as you like about it—the dragon will come and hunt *you* to-morrow, as likely as not. I don't care if he does, you silly Prince."

"You're very rude," said Tiresome.

"Oh, no, only truthful," said Elfinn.

"Well, tell me the truth, then. What is it that if I had known as much as you do about I shouldn't have lost my hippopotamuses?"

"You don't speak very good English," said Elfinn; "but, come, what will you give me if I tell you?"

"If you tell me what?" said the tiresome Prince.

"What you want to know."

"I don't want to know anything," said Prince Tiresome.

"Then you're more of a silly even than I thought," said Elfinn. "Don't you want to know how to settle the dragon before he settles you?"

"It might be as well," the Prince admitted.

"Well, I haven't much patience at any time," said Elfinn, "and now I can assure you that there's very little left. What will you give me if I tell you?"

"Half my kingdom," said the Prince, "and my cousin's hand in marriage."

"Done," said the pig-keeper; "here goes! *The dragon grows small at nights!* He sleeps under the root of this tree. I use him to light my fire with."

And, sure enough, there under the tree was the dragon on a nest of scorched moss, and he was about as long as your finger.

"How can I kill him?" asked the Prince.

"I don't know that you *can* kill him," said Elfinn, "but you can take him away if you've brought anything to put him in. That bottle of yours would do."

"THEY MADE IT CREEP INTO THE SILVER HUNTING-BOTTLE."

So between them they managed, with bits of stick and by singeing their fingers a little, to poke and shove the dragon till they made it creep into the silver hunting-bottle, and then the Prince screwed on the top tight.

"Now we've got him," said Elfinn, "let's take him home and put Solomon's seal on the mouth of the bottle, and then he'll be safe enough. Come along—we'll divide up the kingdom to-morrow, and then I shall have some money to buy fine clothes to go courting in."

But when the wicked Prince made promises he did not make them to keep.

"Go on with you! What do you mean?" he said. "*I* found the dragon and I've imprisoned him. I never said a word about courtings or kingdoms. If you say I did, I shall cut your head off at once." And he drew his sword.

"All right," said Elfinn, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm better off than you are, anyhow."

"What do you mean?" spluttered the Prince.

"Why, you've only got a kingdom (and a dragon), but I've got clean hands (and five-and-seventy fine black pigs)."

So Elfinn sat down again by his fire, and the Prince went home and told his Parliament how clever and brave he had been, and though he woke them up on purpose to tell them, they were not angry, but said —

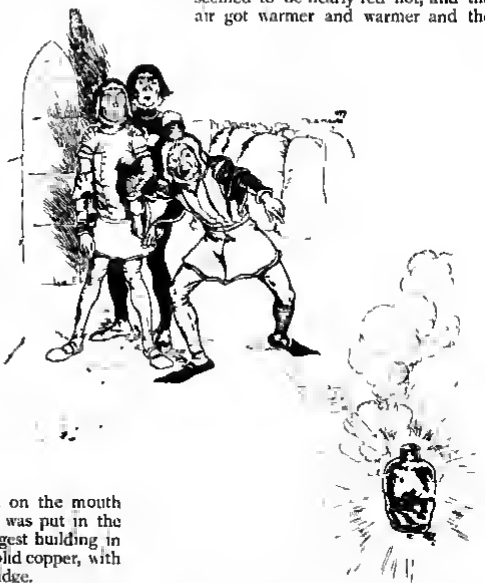
"You are indeed brave and clever." For they knew what happened to people with whom the Prince was not pleased.

Then the Prime Minister solemnly put Solomon's seal on the mouth of the bottle, and the bottle was put in the treasury, which was the strongest building in the town, and was made of solid copper, with walls as thick as Waterloo Bridge.

The bottle was set down among the sacks of gold, and the junior secretary to the junior clerk of the last Lord of the Treasury was appointed to sit up all night with it, and see if anything happened. The junior secretary had never seen a dragon, and, what was more, he did not believe the Prince had ever seen a dragon either. The Prince had never been a really truthful boy, and it would have been just like him to bring home a bottle with nothing in it, and then to pretend that there was a dragon inside. So the junior secretary did not at all mind being left. They gave him the key, and when everyone in the town had gone back to bed he let in some of the junior secretaries from other Government departments, and they had a jolly game of hide-and-seek among the sacks of gold, and played marbles with the diamonds and rubies and pearls in the big ivory chests.

They enjoyed themselves very much, but by-and-by the copper treasury began to get warmer and warmer, and suddenly the junior secretary cried out, "Look at the bottle!"

The bottle sealed with Solomon's seal had swollen to three times its proper size, and seemed to be nearly red hot, and the air got warmer and warmer and the bottle bigger and bigger, till all the junior secretaries agreed that the place was too hot to hold them, and out they went, tumbling over each other in their haste, and just as the last got out and locked the door the bottle burst, and out came the dragon, very fiery,



"THE JUNIOR SECRETARY CRIED OUT, 'LOOK AT THE BOTTLE!'"

and swelling more and more every minute, and he began to eat the sacks of gold, and crunch up the pearls and diamonds and rubies, as you do "hundreds and thousands.'

By breakfast-time he had devoured the whole of the Prince's treasures, and when the Prince came along the street at about eleven, he met the dragon coming out of the broken door of the treasury, with molten gold still dripping from his jaws. Then the Prince turned and ran for his life, and as he ran towards the dragon-proof tower the little white Princess saw him coming, and she ran down and unlocked the door and let him in, and slammed the dragon-proof door in the fiery face of the dragon, who sat down and whined outside, because he wanted the Prince very much indeed.

The Princess took Prince Tiresome into the best room, and laid the cloth, and gave him cream and eggs and white grapes and honey and bread, with many other things, yellow and white and good to eat, and she served him just as kindly as she would have done if he had been anyone else instead of the bad Prince who had taken away her kingdom and kept it for himself—because she was a true Princess and had a heart of gold.

When he had eaten and drunk he begged the Princess to show him how to lock and unlock the door, and the nurse was asleep, so there was no one to tell the Princess not to, and she did.

"You turn the key like this," she said, "and the door keeps shut. But turn it nine times round the wrong way, and the door flies open."

And so it did. And the moment it opened the Prince pushed the white Princess out of her tower, just as he had pushed her out of her kingdom, and shut the door. For he wanted to have the tower all for himself. And there she was in the street, and on the other side of the way the dragon was sitting whining, but he did not try to eat her, because—though the old nurse did not know it—dragons cannot eat white Princesses with hearts of gold.

The Princess could not walk through the streets of the town in her milky-silky gown with the dsisies on it, and with no hat and no gloves, so she turned the other way, and ran out across the meadows, towards the wood. She had never been out of her tower before, and the soft grass under her feet felt like grass of Paradise

She ran right into the thickest part of the wood, because she did not know what her heart was made of, and she was afraid of the dragon, and there in a dell she came on Elfinn and his five-and-seventy fine pigs. He was playing his flute, and around him the pigs were dancing cheerfully on their hind legs.

"Oh, dear," said the Princess, "do take care of me. I am so frightened."

"THE PRINCE PUSHED THE WHITE PRINCESS OUT OF HER TOWER"

"I will," said Elfinn, putting his arms round her. "Now you are quite safe. What were you frightened of?"

"The dragon," said she

"So it's got out of the silver bottle," said Elfinn. "I hope it's eaten the Prince."

"No," said Sabrinetta; "but why?"

So he told her of the mean trick that the Prince had played him.

"And he promised me half his kingdom and the hand of his cousin the Princess," said Elfinn.

"Oh, dear, what a shame!" said Sabrinetta, trying to get out of his arms. "How dared he?"

"What's the matter?" he asked, holding her tighter; "it *was* a shame, or at least I thought so. But *now* he may keep his kingdom, half and whole, if I may keep what I have."

"What's that?" asked the Princess.

"Why, you—my pretty, my dear," said Elfinn, "and as for the Princess, his cousin—forgive me, dearest heart, but when I asked for her I hadn't seen the real Princess, the only Princess, *my* Princess"

"Do you mean me?" said Sabrinetta.

"Who else?" he asked

"Yes, but five minutes ago you hadn't seen me!"

"Five minutes ago I was a pig-keeper—now I've held you in my arms I'm a Prince, though I should have to keep pigs to the end of my days."

"But you haven't asked *me*," said the Princess.

"*You* asked *me* to take care of you," said Elfinn, "and I will—all my life long"

So that was settled, and they began to talk of really important things, such as the dragon and the Prince, and all the time Elfinn did not know that this was the Princess, but he knew that she had a heart of gold: and he told her so, many times.

"The mistake," said Elfinn, "was in not having a dragon-proof bottle. I see that now."

"Oh, is that all?" said the Princess. "I can easily get you one of those—because everything in my tower is dragon-proof. We ought to do something to settle the dragon and save the little children."

So she started off to get the bottle, and she would not let Elfinn come with her.

"If what you say is true," she said—"if you are sure that I have a heart of gold, the dragon won't hurt me, and somebody *must* stay with the pigs."

Elfinn was quite sure, so he let her go.

She found the door of her tower open. The dragon had waited patiently for the Prince, and the moment he opened the door and came out, though he was only out for an instant to post a letter to his Prime Minister, saying where he was, and asking them to send the fire brigade to deal with the fiery dragon, the dragon ate him Then the dragon went back to the wood, because it was getting near his time to grow small for the night.

So Sabrinetta went in and kissed her nurse, and made her a cup of tea and explained what was going to happen, and that she had a heart of gold, so the dragon couldn't eat her, and the nurse saw that, of course, the Princess was quite safe, and kissed her and let her go.

She took the dragon-proof bottle, made of burnished brass, and ran back to the wood, and to the dell where Elfinn was sitting among his sleek black pigs, waiting for her

"I thought you were never coming back," he said, "you have been away a year, at least."

The Princess sat down beside him among the pigs, and they held each other's hands till it was dark, and then the dragon came crawling over the moss, scorching it as he came, and getting smaller as he crawled, and curled up under the root of the tree

"Now, then," said Elfinn, "you hold the bottle"—then he poked and prodded the dragon with bits of stick till it crawled into the dragon-proof bottle. But there was no stopper

"Never mind," said Elfinn, "I'll put my finger in for a stopper."

"No, let me," said the Princess; but, of course, Elfinn would not let her. He stuffed his finger into the top of the bottle, and the Princess cried out—

"The sea—the sea—run for the cliffs!" And off they went, with the five-and-seventy pigs trotting steadily after them in a long, black procession

The bottle got hotter and hotter in Elfinn's hands, because the dragon inside was puffing fire and smoke with all his might. Hotter, and hotter, and hotter, but Elfinn held on till they came to the cliff edge, and there was the dark blue sea, and the whirlpool going round and round.

Elfinn lifted the bottle high above his head and hurled it out between the stars and the sea, and it fell in the middle of the whirlpool.

"We've saved the country," said the Princess. "You've saved the little children. Give me your hands"

"I can't," said Elfinn; "I shall never be able to take your dear hands again. My hands are burnt off"

And so they were: there were only black cinders where his hands ought to have been The Princess kissed them, and cried over

"ELFINN HURLED IT OUT"

them, and tore pieces of her silky milky gown to tie them up with, and the two went back to the tower and told the nurse all about everything. And the pigs sat outside and waited.

"He is the bravest man in the world," said Sabrinetta. "He has saved the country and the little children; but, oh, his hands—his poor, dear, darling hands!"

Here the door of the room opened, and the oldest of the five-and-seventy pigs came in. It went up to Elfinn and rubbed itself against him with little, loving grunts.

"See the dear creature," said the nurse, wiping away a tear; "it knows, it knows!"

Sabrinetta stroked the pig, because Elfinn had no hands for stroking or for anything else.

"The only cure for a dragon burn," said the old nurse, "is pig's fat, and well that faithful creature knows it——"

"I wouldn't for a kingdom," cried Elfinn, stroking the pig as best he could with his elbow.

"Is there no other cure?" asked the Princess.

Here another pig put its black nose in at the door, and then another and another, till the room was full of pigs, a surging mass of rounded blackness, pushing and struggling to get at Elfinn, and grunting softly in the language of true affection.

"There is *one* other," said the nurse, "the dear, affectionate beasts—they all want to die for you."

"What *is* the other cure?" said Sabrinetta, anxiously.

"If a man is burnt by a dragon," said the nurse, "and a certain number of people are willing to die for him, it is enough if each should kiss the burn, and wish it well in the depths of his loving heart."

"The number! The number!" cried Sabrinetta.

"Seventy seven," said the nurse.

"We have only seventy five pigs," said the Princess, "and with me that's seventy-six!"

"It must be seventy-seven—and I really *can't* die for him, so nothing can be done," said the nurse, sadly. "He must have cork hands."

"I knew about the seventy-seven loving people," said Elfinn. "But I never thought my dear pigs loved me so much as all this, and my dear, too—— And, of course, that only makes it more impossible. There's *one* other charm that cures dragon burns, though, but I'd rather be burnt black all over than marry anyone but you, my dear, my pretty."

"Why, who must you marry to cure your dragon burns?" asked Sabrinetta.

"A Princess. That's how St. George cured *his* burns."

"There now! think of that!" said the nurse. "And I never heard tell of that cure—old as I am."

But Sabrinetta threw her arms round

Elfinn's neck, and neld him as though she would never let him go

"Then it's all right, my dear, brave, precious Elfinn," she cried, "for I *am* a Princess, and you shall be my Prince. Come along, nurse—don't wait to put on your bonnet. We'll go and be married this very moment."

So they went, and the pigs came after, moving in stately blackness, two by two. And, the minute he was married to the Princess, Elfinn's hands got quite well. And the people, who were weary of Prince Tiresome and his hippopotamuses, hailed Sabrinetta and her husband as rightful Sovereigns of the land.

Next morning the Prince and Princess went out to see if the dragon had been washed ashore. They could see nothing of him; but when they looked out towards the whirlpool they saw a cloud of steam; and the fishermen reported that the water for miles round was hot enough to shave with! And as the water is hot there to this day, we may feel pretty sure that the fierceness of that dragon was such that all the waters of all the sea were not enough to cool him. The whirlpool is too strong for him to be able to get out of it, so there he spins round and round for ever and ever, doing some useful work at last, and warming the water for poor fisher-folk to shave with.

The Prince and Princess rule the land well and wisely. The nurse lives with them, and does nothing but fine sewing, and only that when she wants to very much. The Prince keeps no hippopotamuses, and is consequently very popular. The five-and-seventy devoted pigs live in white marble sties with brass knockers and "Pig" on the door-plate, and are washed twice a day with Turkish sponges and soap scented with violets, and no one objects to *their* following the Prince when he walks abroad, for they behave beautifully, and always keep to the footpath, and obey the notices about not walking on the grass. The Princess feeds them every day with her own hands, and her first edict on coming to the throne was that the word "Pork" should never be uttered on pain of death, and should, besides, be scratched out of all the dictionaries!

"THEY SAW A CLOUD OF STEAM."

THE GORGON'S HEAD

By GERTRUDE BACON

"THEY that go down to the sea in ships" see strange things, but what they tell is ofttimes stranger still. A faculty for romancing is imparted by a seafaring life as readily and surely as a rolling gait and a weather-beaten countenance. A fine imagination is one of the gifts of the ocean—witness the surprising and unlimited power of expression and epithet possessed by the sailor. And a fine imagination will frequently manifest itself in other ways besides swear words.

Captain Brander is one of the most gifted men in this way in the whole merchant service. His officers say of him with pride that he possesses the largest vocabulary in the great steamship company of which he is one of the oldest and most respected skippers, and his yarns are only equalled in their utter impossibility by the genius he displays in furnishing them with minute detail and all the outward circumstance of truth.

I first learned this fact from the second engineer the evening of the sixth day of our voyage, as we leant across the bulwarks and watched the sunset. The second engineer was a bit of a liar—or I should say romancer—himself. The day he took me down into the engine-room he told me, as personal experiences, tales of mutinous Lascar firemen, unpopular officers who disappeared suddenly into the fiery maw of blazing furnaces, and so forth, which, whatever foundation of fact they may have possessed, certainly did not lose in the telling. As a humble aspirant in the same branch of art he naturally was quick to recognise the genius of that past master, the captain, and his admiration for his chief was as boundless as it was sincere.

"I say, Miss Baker," he said, *à propos* of nothing, "have you had the skipper 'on' yet?"

"Not that I am aware of," I said. "What do you mean?"

"Why, has he been spinning you any yarns yet? There isn't a man in the service can touch him for stories. I don't deny that he has seen some service, and been in some tight places, but for a real out-and-out lie, commend me to old Monkey Brand!" (It was by this sobriquet, I regret to say, suggested partly by his name, and mostly by his undoubted resemblance to a well-known advertisement, that the worthy captain was known in the unregenerate engine-room.)

"Oh, I should just love to hear him," I cried. "There is nothing I should like better. Do tell me how I can manage to draw him."

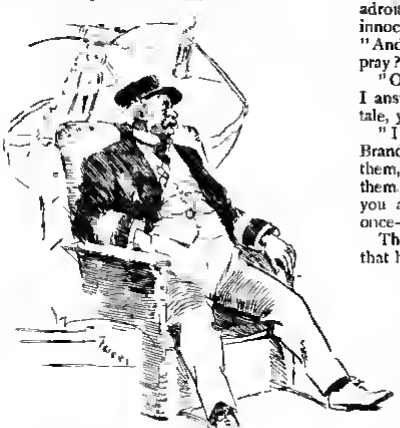
"Well, he doesn't want much drawing as a rule," said the engineer. "He likes to give vent to his imagination. Let me see," he continued; "to-morrow afternoon we shall be about passing the Grecian Islands. Ask him about them, and try and get him on the subject of Gorgons."

"Gorgons!" I said. "What a strange topic! Why, since I've left school I have almost forgotten what they were. Weren't they mythological creatures who turned people into stone when they looked at them?"

"That's about it, I believe," said the engineer, "and a fellow called Perseus cut off their heads, or something of that kind. It's a lie anyhow, but you ask the skipper."

It was the custom of Captain Brander every afternoon to make a kind of royal progress among his passengers. Going the entire circuit of the ship; passing slowly from group to group, with a joke here and a chat there, and bestowing his favours in lordly and impartial fashion—especially among the ladies. I have watched him often coming the whole length of the promenade deck, making some outrageous compliment to one girl, patting another on the shoulder, even chucking a third under the chin; a sense of supreme self-satisfaction animating his red cheeks, curling his grey hair, and suffusing his whole short, portly person. Eccentric he was; indifferent to

his personal appearance—his battered old cap had seen almost as much service as he had—but a more popular man or an abler officer never walked the bridge. On this particular occasion I was at the end of the deck, and had so arranged that an inviting deck chair stood vacant beside me. Wearied by his progress by the time he reached me, he fell at once into my little trap, and sat down on the empty chair, leant back, and spread his legs. He and I were



"HE LEANT BACK AND SPREAD HIS LEGS."

fast friends, and had been since the day when I tried to photograph him, and he had frustrated my design by unscrewing the front lens of my camera and keeping it in his pocket for the rest of the morning.

"Captain," I said, pointing to a cloudy grey outline faintly visible against the eastern horizon, "what land is that?"

"My dear young lady," said he, "I am quite sick of answering that question! If I have been asked it once I have been asked it twenty times in the last half-hour. That old Mrs. Matherson in the red shawl button-holed me on the subject to such an extent that I thought I should never get away again. Wonderful thirst for information that old party has! And she appears to think that because I'm captain I must have a complete knowledge of geography, geology, history, etymology, mythology, *and* navigation. Well, for the twenty first time, then, we are passing the isles off the coast of Greece, and that one straight ahead is Zante."

"So that is Greece, is it?" I mused aloud. "Well, from here at least it looks old enough and romantic enough to be the home of all those ancient heroes we read about—Alexander and Hercules and—and—Gorgons and those sort of things." I felt I had introduced the subject somewhat lamely, after all, and the captain looked me full in the face as if suspecting a plot. But if I am not very adroit in conversation, I can at least look innocent upon occasions, and he merely said, "And what do you know about Gorgons, pray?"

"Oh, as much as most people, I expect," I answered. "They are only a sort of fairy tale, you know."

"I am not so sure of that," said Captain Brander. "Those fairy tales, as you call them, have often truth at the bottom of them. And as to Gorgons, why, I could tell you a little incident that happened to me once—but it's rather a long story."

Then I urged my best persuasions—not that he needed much pressing—and pushing his old cap off his bald forehead, and speaking slowly and with that almost American accent peculiar to him, he unfolded his tale of wonder as follows:—

"It's nearly thirty years ago, Miss Baker—that's long before *you* were ever born or thought of—that I was fourth officer of the *Heslar*, 2,000-ton vessel of this same company I serve to this day. How times have altered, to be sure! The *Heslar* was reckoned a fine ship in those days, and if you had told me that I should presently command an 8,000-tonner, such as I do this day, with 11,000 horse power engines, and more men for the crew alone than the *Heslar* could hold when she was packed her tightest, I very probably wouldn't have believed you. However, that is neither here nor there. But thirty years ago in the spring time—now I come to think of it, it was in the month of April—we were cruising in this very neighbourhood, and one thick foggy night our skipper lost his bearings a bit, got too near the coast, and ran us ashore off the south point of Zante.

"Of course there was a great fuss, and everybody came up on deck with life-belts, and all the girls screamed, and all the young fellows swore to save them or die in the attempt; and the skipper turned as white as paper—not that he was afraid, for he was no

coward—none of our officers are that—but because he knew his prospects were ruined, and he would be turned out of the company and perhaps lose his certificate, and he'd got a wife and a big family, poor chap! Of course that consideration didn't affect *me*, for I was in my bunk and asleep at the time, but it was certainly unfortunate for him.

"Well, it was very soon discovered that the ship wasn't going down in a hurry, and nobody got into the boats, though they were lowered ready. And when daylight came we saw we were fast on the rocks, with half the stern under water, and the saloon and a lot of the cabins flooded. But more than that the *Haslar* couldn't sink, and at low water you might almost walk dryshod on to the shore. There was no getting her off, however, and so all the passengers were landed and sent home as best they could across country, and a rough time they had of it, for Zante is not an over-hospitable sort of a place; while we officers had to stick to the ship till we could get help, and then till she was repaired sufficiently to work her into dock somewhere.

"It was a tedious job, for help was slow in coming, and then all her boilers had to be taken out before she would float, and we fellows got jolly sick of it, I can tell you, for we were hard worked, and Zante is a wretched hole to spend more than half an hour in. Our one amusement, when we were off duty, was to go ashore on foot or row round the island in a boat, shooting wild fowl and exploring the country. There was precious little to see and not much to shoot, and it was slow fun altogether till, one day, the second officer came back from a tramp ashore and told us he had found his way to some very remote village on the eastern coast, where there was a cave among the hills which the villagers warned him not to enter. He could not gather for what reason, because he didn't understand enough of their outlandish tongue, but as it was then growing late he was obliged to return to the ship without further investigation.

"I was always one for adventure when I was a lad, and directly the second officer told his tale I made up my mind to go and explore that cave before any of the rest had a chance. It so happened that next day was my turn for going ashore, and I went and looked up one of the assistant engineers and persuaded him to come with me. I wanted him because he was a chum of mine, and also he was the only one of us who could talk the language a bit. He had been in those parts before and generally acted as interpreter in our dealings with the natives. His name was Travers, a queer little dark chap, with black eyes and a hot temper, but a pleasant fellow enough if you did not rub him up the wrong way, and game for anything under the sun. He readily agreed to come with me, and we started as soon as we could get away, telling no one of our destination, for we had no wish to be forestalled.

"It was a long tramp, right across the island, to the village which Jenkins, the second officer, had indicated. But at last, after climbing a weary hill, we looked down on some clustering huts standing amid vine yards in the valley beneath, while another and much sheerer cliff rose on the opposite side, whose rugged scarp was all rent and riven as by an earthquake, and intersected by a deep ravine. Here and there among the rocks were dark shadows and black patches which might be the entrances to caverns in the crag. 'This must be the place,' I said, 'and one of those is the forbidden cave. How are we to find out which?'

"As if in answer to my question, at this moment there came along the hill top towards us a burly countryman with a sun burned face and tattered garments. He regarded us with astonishment, as well he might, for they get few strangers in those parts, and he made some remark to us in his queer language, which, of course, I didn't understand, but Travers did and replied to it. Finding he was understood, the countryman stopped and talked.

"'Ah!' he said, or so Travers interpreted. 'So you have reached the valley of the Haunted Cavern! It is far to seek and hard to find, but it lies spread beneath you.'

"'But which is the Haunted Cavern, and why is it so called?' asked Travers.

"'It lies in yonder cleft of the hills,' answered the man, pointing to the opposite ravine, 'and it is called the Haunted Cavern because none who venture there return alive. Nay, they return not either alive or dead. They are seen no more!'

"'Tell that to the Marines!' said Travers, only he translated it into Greek, of course, or what the Zante people think is Greek. 'You don't expect me to believe such a yarn as that! Why, what is there up in that place?'

"'That is what none can tell,' replied the peasant, 'for none come back to say. And, indeed, it is the truth I speak. Many men have attempted to find the secret. In bygone days I have heard, a whole party of soldiers were sent there to search for brigands supposed to be in hiding, but not one was

seen again. The cavern has an evil name, and now is shunned by one and all, but every now and again there arises a youth venturesome beyond the rest, and he heeds not the warnings of the old, but hopes to break the spell and find the treasure that some say is hidden there, and he starts in high hope and courage, but never again do we behold his face!'

"'But what is the reason?' persisted Travers, the incredulous.

"'Nay, that we cannot say,' reiterated the man. 'A short distance can one go up the mvine that leads to the cavern. I have been there myself, and truly there is nothing that can be seen except a barren valley, scattered all over with big black stones. Nothing more, and farther than the entrance none must venture.'

"'Oh, I say!' exclaimed Travers, in delight, 'did you ever hear such an old liar? This beats anything I could have believed possible in the nineteenth century. Come on, Brander! We are in luck this time!' and the impetuous fellow dashed off down the hill, I at his heels, leaving the countryman dumb with amazement behind us.

"At the foot of the hill we entered the little village. An old, white haired man of rather superior appearance was crossing the road before us. Travers accosted him and asked him the way to the Haunted Cavern. The old man turned quite pale with astonishment and apprehension.

"'The Haunted Cavern, my son!' he said, in quavering tones; 'surely you are not going thither?'

"'Yes, we are, though,' said Travers, his eyes dancing with excitement. It is wonderful what enterprise that boy—he was little more—had in him. 'And if you won't tell us, we'll find the way out for ourselves!' and he pushed past the old man, who held out his skinny hands as if to detain him.

"Before we had got clear of the hamlet the news had somehow got circulated that we were about to explore the ravine, and the whole of the inhabitants turned out in the wildest excitement. Some were for staying us forcibly, till Travers began to get quite nasty, drew his revolver, and talked of firing. Many reiterated and emphasized alarming warnings and assurances that we should never return. All watched us with the most intense interest, and followed close on our footsteps until we began to near the fatal spot, when they fell off singly or in parties, till finally at the very entrance of the ravine we had left even the boldest spirits behind us.

"THE OLD MAN HELD OUT HIS SKINNY HANDS TO DETAIN HIM."

"In truth, it was a strange spot to which we had penetrated. The narrow path had led us suddenly round the spur of the mountain, and now, look which way we might, the giant rocks towered up sheer above us, hundreds of feet high, in inaccessible grey walls. The sinking sun was now too low to shine within this well-like space, which his rays could only reach at midday, and the very air struck damp and chill. We were in an open valley, thus shut in by the cliffs, of considerable extent, but not to be reached by any path except that we had traversed. The ground was firm and smooth, but littered all over with the strangest black stones of all sorts of shapes, and in all positions, though of a fairly uniform size, and alike in material. There was something uncanny and weird about these queer black boulders, which

strewed the valley the thicker the farther we advanced, till at the far end of the space, where a huge back hole yawned ominous in the cliff, they almost entirely blocked the way.

"The dark cavern looked terribly grim and forbidding in the fading light. A little stream issued from its mouth and trickled among the stones. It did not gurgle and glisten as most mountain streams, but flowed noiselessly, sluggish, and dull, and gathered in stagnant pools on its rocky bed. No birds sang in that dismal nook; no sound from without penetrated to its recesses. All was silent, dim, and chill as the tomb itself.

"Despite my utmost efforts, I felt the spell of the weird, wild spot stealing over me, and a cold shudder crept down my backbone. There was but room for one at a time in the ever-narrowing track, and I was at first leading. My steps became slower and slower, and finally I paused altogether and turned to look back on Travers to see if he too was feeling the oppressive sense of evil that seemed to hang heavy in the very air. But in his face was only visible an ecstasy almost of eagerness and delight. His dark eyes sparkled again, his cheeks were flushed, his breath came quick, and his whole body was quivering with excitement.

"DID YOU EVER SEE SUCH QUEER STONES?"

"'Go on, Brander?' he cried. 'What are you stopping for, man? This is grand! This is luck, indeed! Did you ever see such a place? Come on, I want to get to that cave.'

"I felt utterly ashamed to confess my weakness, but it was that cave that I had begun to dread more and more. Whatever else I may be, Miss Baker, it is not boasting to say I am no coward. I have seen danger, aye, and courted it all my life, and until that moment I doubt if I had known what fear was. But I knew then the blind, unreasoning fear that saps the strength of mind and limb and melts the heart and paralyzes all thought save that one overpowering instinct to fly—somewhere. Yet, in face of Travers's eagerness, I could not bear to show the white feather. I turned my back therefore on the dark cavern, now just ahead of us, and endeavoured to temporize.

"'Travers,' I said, 'did you ever see such queer stones? How do you suppose they have got here? They are quite a different nature from these cliffs, so they could not have fallen from the sides.'

"'Oh, bother the stones!' said Travers. 'I can't look at them now, I want to get into the cave. Quick, before it gets dark!' and as I still hesitated, he pushed past me into a more open space beyond, almost at the cavern's mouth. I did not dare to leave him, and was scrambling after him as best I might, when I suddenly heard him cry out in a voice such as I had never heard before, and hope never to again. A shrill, high pitched cry in which there were surprise, wonder, disgust, alarm, and awful horror all combined in one—a cry of astonishment, a shriek of agony, a shout of dismay. 'Look, Brander' look! look!'

"I could have sworn that when he spoke my companion was in full view, close beside me, touching me almost, though at the exact moment my eyes were looking from him, but

when I turned my head in answer to his cry he was gone

"For one second only had my gaze been averted, but in that time he had utterly vanished from sight, disappeared in a flash, gone—whither? A large black stone stood close beside me, similar to the rest in that ghostly valley; yet it struck me somehow that I had not noticed it there before. I placed my hand upon it as I peered round behind to see if Travers were there, and a shudder I could not explain ran up my arm, for the stone felt warm to the touch. I had not time then to analyze my unreasonable horror at this trivial circumstance; I was too eager to find my friend. I rushed madly among the stones, I yelled his name again and again, but the weird echoes of my cry, returned in countless reflections from cliff and cavern, alone answered me.

"In a frenzy of despair I continued my search, for certain was I that by no natural means could Travers have disappeared so utterly in so brief a space. Blind panic seized me, and I knew not what I did, till my eye suddenly fell on a shallow pool of water collected in a rocky hollow at my very feet. It was not more than a couple of inches deep, and scarce a yard across, but on its placid face were reflected the overhanging rock and opening of the cavern just behind it, and also something else that glued my eyes to it in horror and rooted my flying feet to the ground.

"Just above the cavern's mouth was a narrow ledge of rock, running horizontally, and of a few inches in width. On this natural shelf, reflected in the water, I saw, hanging downwards, a decayed fragment of goat-skin, rotten with age, but which might have been bound round something, long years before. Upon this, as if escaped from its folds, rested a Head.

"MY EYE SUDDENLY FELL ON A SHALLOW POOL OF WATER."

"It was a human head, severed at the neck, but fresh and unfaded as if but newly dead. It bore the features of a woman—of a woman of more perfect loveliness than was ever told of in tale, or sculptured in marble, or painted on canvas. Every feature, every line, was of the truest beauty, cast in the noblest mould—the face of a goddess. But upon that perfect countenance was the mark of eternal pain, of deathless agony and suffering past words. The forehead was lined and knit, the death-white lips were tightly pressed in speechless torment, in the wide eyes seemed yet to lurk the flame of an unquenchable fire, while around the fair brows, in place of hair, curled and coiled the stark bodies of venomous serpents, stiff in death, but their loathsome forms still erect, their evil heads yet thrust forward as if to strike.

"My heart ceased beating, and the chill of death crept over my limbs, as with eyes starting from their sockets I stared at that awful head, reflected in the pool. For hours it seemed to me I gazed fascinated, as the bird by the eye of the snake that has charmed it. I was as incapable of thought as movement, till suddenly forgotten school-room learning began to cross my brain, and I knew that I

looked at the reflection of Medusa, the Gorgon, fairest and foulest of living things, the unclean creature, half woman, half eagle, slain by the hero Perseus, and one glimpse of whose tortured face turned the luckless beholder into stone with the horror of it.

"If I once raised my eyes from the reflection to the actual head above I knew that I too should freeze in a moment into another black block, even as poor Travers, and every other who had entered the accursed valley had done before. And as this thought

"I PRESSED IT SHY FORWARD."

occurred to me, the longing to lift my eyes and look upon the real object became so overpowering that, in sheer self-preservation, I inclined my face closer and closer to the water till I seemed almost to touch it, when my senses fled and I knew no more.

"When I woke at last it was far on in the night, and a bright moon, riding high, shone full down upon the valley, revealing the ragged rocks and scattered stones with a cold brilliance that almost equalled the day. I was lying chilled and stiff beside the pool,

and I started up in amazement, unable to recall to my mind, for a moment, where I was or what I was doing there. I had my back to the cavern, fortunately, and as I gazed over the ghostly and deserted scene the events of the day suddenly returned to my mind in a single flash of terror.

"To escape from this ghastly place was now my only thought, and in order to do this I resolved to look no more at the pool at my feet in case the terrible fascination should again take possession of me. What it cost me to adhere to this resolution I cannot tell you, but with the courage of despair I pressed blindly forward to the mouth of the ravine, only pausing a second to lay my hand upon the now ice-cold stone that once was Travers.

"Poor Travers! gay, light-hearted fellow! Ever in the forefront of mischief, of danger, of adventure. How eager he had been to solve the secret of the haunted valley, which now must be his tomb for ever. How full of health and spirits he had scrambled a few hours before among those very boulders, one of which now, standing stiffly erect among its forest of brethren, was at once the monument and sole relic of a fearless lad, a cheery friend, and a gallant seaman. Dear old Travers! Brave, foolish boy! My heart was heavy, indeed, for his awful fate, as I reverently touched the stone and murmured to the night breeze, stealing around the rocks, 'Good-bye, old fellow, sleep sound!'

"It seemed to me, in my loneliness and terror, that my fearsome journey would never be ended; that, lost in a labyrinth, I should tread that valley for ever. But at last, after endless ages, I reached the mouth of the ravine, and once on open ground I stretched my cramped limbs and ran, without ceasing, till I once more reached the ship."

Here the captain paused, more from want of breath than anything else, I think.

"Go on, Captain Brander," I cried. "You haven't half finished yet. What did they say when you returned, and how did you explain about poor Travers?"

"Young lady," said Captain Brander, "don't ask any more questions. I think I have told you enough for one afternoon," and here, an officer coming up and summoning him, he left me.

Stories of the Sanctuary Club.

By L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace. Told by Paul Cato.

VI.—THE SECRET OF THE PRISON HOUSE.

As Chetwynd and I were leaving Ray Park on the night which followed poor Sutherland's death, Kort accompanied us.

"I will come with you if you have no objection," he said. "As far as I can tell there is nothing more for me to do here, but if necessary I can return to-morrow."

Neither Chetwynd nor I found ourselves able to utter a word. Kort seemed to take our silence for consent, and we three went back to the Club. We did not reach our destination until between nine and ten o'clock. Dinner was over, and many of the members were scattered in different quarters of the large central hall. Cards and games of all sorts were the order of the hour; everything looked peaceful and quite as usual. Not one of our guests suspected through what a time of tragedy and strain we three medical men had just passed.

Chetwynd and I said a few words to our different guests, and presently found ourselves in the corridor which led to our consulting rooms. These happened to be close together.

"I am coming with you, Cato," said Chetwynd, "there is much to talk over."

There was a ring in his voice which I recognised. My friend was roused at last, roused with a vengeance. The moment we entered my consulting-room he turned the key in the lock, and then came and stood near me.

"Pray sit down," I said.

"I cannot sit," was his answer. "You know what I think of this."

"How can I guess your thoughts?"

"Good God! Cato, you can, and you do. This is no time for subterfuge. We have both the same thought, we both know that the man Kort is guilty."

"Guilty of many things, doubtless," I answered; "but scarcely of the crime which we thought he had participated in early in the day."

"I do not believe in Sutherland's confession," was Chetwynd's answer. "I have seen Sutherland's writing several times, and my impression is that what we read to-day is nothing more or less than a clever forgery. Kort was desperate and would stick at nothing. Cato, he must resign his partnership immediately. If he refuses we must close the Club."

"Ah," I said, "you are coming to my conclusion; it is a relief to hear you. You agree with me fully?"

"I agree with you. This is the third shady affair in which Kort has been implicated during the last few months. For the reputation of the Club, to say nothing of your reputation and mine, we must put things straight without the possibility of further mistake, and our only way, so far as I can see, is through Mrs. Kort. There is not the slightest doubt that she is cognisant of her husband's character. The few words she has dropped to you are sufficient to prove this. There was a time when I believed her insane, led to my belief by Kort's specious words. I no longer hold that theory. There is something wrong with the woman—what, God only knows—but, at least in the Davos rooms, she is in full possession of her faculties. We have got to discover what awful hold her husband has over her. Our next interview must be under official authority. I propose that we have it early to-morrow morning. It is too late to-night to do anything, but I shall telephone as soon as ever I can to-morrow to Inspector Clarkson, put the whole thing before him, and beg him to take up the matter privately and at our expense. Each individual occurrence may be insufficient for our purpose, but linked together they make a formidable chain to break."

"I echo your words, Chetwynd," I replied; "matters cannot go on as they are doing. If for no other reason, for the sake of that wretched woman upstairs, we must take the bull by the horns."

We talked a little longer and afterwards retired to our rooms, but I for one could not sleep. The catastrophe which hung over our heads was all too imminent. It needed but a breath of the truth to get abroad for each member of the Club to resign. In any case now, I greatly feared that we were scarcely likely to save ourselves.

At an early hour on the following morning Chetwynd telephoned to Clarkson.

The reply came back that the inspector would be with us in an hour.

I had many patients to see that morning, and, after attending them, passed through the laboratory on my way to Chetwynd's room. As I entered the large outer laboratory I found Kort engaged in conversation with an elderly, Jewish-looking man, evidently a foreigner. The moment Kort saw me he came forward in his usual deliberate and perfectly calm manner, and introduced the stranger as Mr Myerstein.

"My lawyer," he added.

I rather wondered why Kort was seeing

"MY LAWYER," HE ADDED.

his lawyer that morning, but had not time to give serious thought to the matter. The sound of wheels on the gravel sweep arrested my attention, and I recognised Clarkson as he dismounted from the dog cart which we had sent to the station to meet him. I myself conducted the inspector to Chetwynd's room, and we there began to discuss the whole case.

After listening to our story, Clarkson said, quietly, "I may as well inform you that for a long time the house has been under observation on account of Mr Kort, but we could take no action until you called one of us in to investigate. From what you have told me I am now quite justified in demanding one thing."

"What is that?" I asked.

"An interview with Mrs. Kort. I wish to interview the lady without a moment's delay. You, Dr. Cato, are practically certain that Mrs Kort is in possession of information as to her husband's character which she is anxious to divulge?"

"Yes," I replied. "From the occasional short interviews I have had with her, I am certain on this point."

"Then matters are simplified at once," said Clarkson. "If both you gentlemen are prepared to certify to the lady's sanity while in her own apartments any evidence obtained there will be valid. Now, from what you have told me I shall insist on such an interview. We will, therefore, hold it at once. If the result should occasion it I can soon get the necessary warrant to arrest Mr. Kort. Is he in the house at present?"

"He is," I answered. "I saw him just before you arrived. Shall I send for him to come here?"

"I should be glad to see him," replied the inspector.

I pressed the bell.

"Tell Mr Kort that his presence is required here at once," I said to the servant, who bowed and withdrew.

"He will do what he can to prevent our interviewing his wife," I said. "That goes without saying. He will make his usual excuse that she cannot stand excitement."

The inspector smiled drily but said nothing. We waited in silence. It was clear to all of us that we were at last on the verge of the great crisis to which events had been gradually leading up. There was no possible loophole for the truth to escape. I felt sure that we could bring the authority of the law into requisition and demand a

full explanation from Mrs. Kort. Once this was given the rest would be easy. Only one misgiving had I now, and that was caused by Kort's own extraordinary self-possession, and also by his presence in the Club.

"He must have returned to guard his wife," I said to myself; "he has come back to keep her in check. It is impossible that he should not be aware of his own danger. But what hold can he possibly have over her which would prevent her telling us the truth when we interview her alone?"

Suddenly the handle of the door clicked, and I involuntarily started in my seat. Kort quietly entered the room. He was holding himself erect as usual, his face looked quite calm, and his dark, somewhat melancholy eyes glanced from one of us to the other with an expression of well-assumed surprise. When his gaze fell upon Inspector Clarkson I saw him lift his heavy eyebrows just for a moment, and the dawn of a smile flitted round his lips.

Meanwhile the officer's keen grey eyes fixed themselves on his face with an impatient and penetrating look.

"You wished to see me?" asked Kort, in a low voice. He glanced at each of us in turn.

"We do," I answered, "pray sit down."

He sank into an easy chair and folded his arms.

"You are of course aware, Mr. Kort," I began, and as I spoke I rose to my feet, "that the position in which we in this Club are placed, owing to the continued occurrence of events of a suspicious nature, admits of only one line of action. Waiving for the moment the fact that nothing has been actually proved against you, Dr. Chetwynd and I have decided to request you to resign your partnership with us, on account of the strong circumstantial evidence against you. Further, since it is directly due to your instrumentality that the reputation of the Club and our own reputations are seriously involved, we desire to arrive at some explanation of this mysterious business. We have, therefore, decided to invoke the aid of the authorities."

"I fully comprehend you," answered Kort, quietly, "and I also entirely sympathize with your intentions."

"There is one point it is necessary to deal with without further delay," I continued. "From short and interrupted interviews with your wife"—as I uttered the latter words I noticed the slightest contraction of the man's folded arms and the faintest hardening of the lines round his mouth—"I went on quickly—"I am driven to believe that she can explain a good deal to us of what is still dark as regards these matters, and we, in the company of Inspector Clarkson, have decided to see her this morning in her own apartments. On more than one occasion she has been on the point of making some disclosure to me, but was prevented from doing so owing to her extraordinary attacks of lapses of memory, attacks which I fail to understand."

"I am not surprised that you cannot understand them," was Kort's answer. "I, who have watched her so closely, have utterly failed to come to any explanation myself. But with regard to your previous remarks. I am glad to have the opportunity of saying that I intend to resign my partnership and to leave England. But as to this interview which you propose holding with my wife, before you do so I must give you a word of warning." His eyes brightened with a deadly glitter as he looked full at me. "My wife's condition is a very precarious one. She is as I have told you before, insane"—here he glanced at Chetwynd. "This wholesale invasion of her private rooms will be fraught with the utmost danger to her, and I refuse to let you see her." And he abruptly left the room.

The inspector shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing can be done," he said, "unless Mr. Kort will leave his wife free for us to see her."

"There is little hope of that, I fear," I said. "But we will watch for every chance, and let you know at once should any opportunity occur. Do not rest over this matter," I continued, to the inspector, "employ your keenest wits upon it, your most able detectives, make every inquiry in your power."

"I will, sir, and if you want me ring me up and I'll be here as soon as ever I can. At present I am afraid there is nothing further that I can do."

The man left the room. When we found ourselves alone I turned to Chetwynd.

"This is maddening," I cried. "The face of that unhappy woman upstairs haunts me. Have you not noticed her yourself, Chetwynd? While her lips refuse to betray that fiend, her eyes speak volumes, and whenever we have seen her, her misery has been apparent. If she is not already insane she soon will be, driven to it by that man's villainies. He is a monster in human shape."

"Like the Evil One, he has brains and knows

how to use them," said Chetwynd, gloomily "Yes, I sympathize with every word you say, Cato, but how to solve the mystery, how to get at the truth is the puzzle If Mrs Kort cannot help us, to whom are we to apply?"

"Have you nothing to suggest?" I asked "You don't mean to say you will let him go, you will let him take his miserable wife away without settling his heavy account with us and with her, and with the law of the land? Chetwynd, I have often heard you boast that you never yet were beaten by a problem Turn your mind on this. Break through this horrible suspicion and anxiety"

He made no answer To and fro he paced the room in silence. His hands were thrust deep into his pockets, his head bent down

"HE PACED THE ROOM IN SILENCE."

"Has Kort said when he is leaving?" he suddenly asked

"Not a word"

"Very well, I have an idea It is this. I will go immediately and try to find out something of his past and of his wife's past. It is possible, through channels now at the disposal of everyone, to get information about her prior to her marriage I am certain that it is only by going back and taking up the threads of his earlier days and then following them carefully that we shall get a solution of the present mystery Will you, Cato, stay quietly here and watch events while I go and make inquiries? If I am not back to-night, you will hear from me."

"Very well," I answered, "anything you think best. Up to the present the members suspect nothing. There is no one specially ill, you can be spared without exciting suspicion"

The rest of the day passed without anything frsh occurring At dinner Kort and I sat, one at the head, the other at the foot of the long dining-table Conversation of the usual kind went on Outwardly, all was sunshine, for the day happened to have been particularly fine, and some of the members of the Club were in specially high spirits One lady in especial told me that she herself was deriving so much benefit by our treatment that she intended to bring her daughter to the Club the following week As she said the latter words, she slightly dropped her voice.

"Why does not Mrs. Kort take her rightful position in this establishment?" she asked. "I met her for the first time last night. What a very beautiful young woman she is, but she looked ill. Is she ill?"

"I am sorry to tell you that Mrs. Kort is a chronic invalid," was my reply.

"She told me last night that she occupied the Davos suite. Is she consumptive?"

"Not that I know of," I said

"But why does she stay in those rooms? She scarcely ever leaves them. I thought they were intended for consumptive patients"

"Primarily so, but they are also suitable for other maladies"

"And what is hers? May I know?"

"I wish I could tell you," I answered. "Her illness puzzles us all not a little" As I spoke I raised my voice, and just at that moment encountered the keen, cold glance of Kort. We rose from the table without anything further being said with regard to Mrs. Kort

Between nine and ten that evening Kort entered my sitting-room.

"I shall not keep you a moment," he said "This is Wednesday, my wife and I intend leaving here on Friday morning"

"You make a hasty exit," was my answer

"I could not stay an hour longer than absolutely necessary under this roof,' was his

reply. "I shall be glad to go With regard to money matters and the terms of my partnership, I have placed all my affairs in the hands of my lawyer, Mr Myerstein, he will correspond with you on these subjects."

I made no answer and merely bowed as he left me. He closed the door, and I sat on by the fire. What was the mystery? Beyond doubt Mrs. Kort held the key of the situation which for some inexplicable reason she refused to render up. Would those two go out of our lives, and the tragedy which concerned them remain for ever unsolved?

At eleven o'clock that night a messenger brought me a short note from Chetwynd

"Getting nearer. Not home to-night. Stay in to-morrow"

I burned the note in case it should fall into other hands, and then went to bed.

In spite of my depression Chetwynd's words had cheered me. I had every faith in his sagacity, and I knew that his note was pregnant with meaning The following day passed quietly. Chetwynd did not return nor did I get any tidings of him. Kort was busy as usual, just as though he intended to remain at the Sanctuary Club for ever I heard nothing with regard to Mrs Kort, and a wild desire to enter her presence and force the truth from her was abandoned as soon as it occurred to me.

In the afternoon I met Kort in the hall I now observed with a certain degree of pleasure a strange restlessness in his manner; his face, too, was pale. He inquired at once where Chetwynd was I replied briefly that he had left the Club on special business.

At a quarter past four that afternoon, as the usual custom was, the servant entered my sitting room with the post-bag to ask for the country letters. I noticed as he spoke that he had several letters in his hand, and, as I put mine into the bag, he added the pile which he held When he did this I happened to notice one in Kort's handwriting. It was addressed to his lawyer, Myerstein, at some place in the south-west district. I

"I PUT MINE INTO THE BAG."

gave it a passing thought, and then forgot it. The man left the room, and I sat on by the fire Hours passed, I felt more and more depressed, and less and less inclined to move Suddenly I started to my feet How the time had gone by! It was nearly seven o'clock. I was about to leave the room to dress for dinner when the door was quickly opened and Chetwynd walked in

"My dear fellow," I cried, grasping his hand, "what news?"

He closed the door, locked it, and returned to the middle of the room His face was calm, but I knew him well enough to be sure that beneath his apparent coolness a terrible furnace of excitement was consuming him.

"I have discovered information of the utmost importance with regard to Mrs. Kort," he said, quietly.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I will tell you," he continued. "It may explain a good deal. Her maiden name was Elkington. She was the only daughter of a certain Captain Elkington, who died when she was quite a girl, leaving her, however, sufficient money to maintain her in comfort. She was fond of science, and elected to take a medical course. She went to Vienna to study medicine in the schools there, and took her degree. While there she became engaged to our poor young friend, Philip Sherwin. Ah, you start!"

"I have reason to," I replied; "I cannot forget poor Sherwin's dying words—'*Ask him* (Kort) *about Isobel when I am gone.*'"

Chetwynd was silent for a moment.

"Pray listen," he said then; "there is more to follow. Miss Elkington was engaged to Sherwin. Kort appeared upon the scene. He was also studying medicine, and, doubtless, met his wife at the medical schools. The next event in the chain of circumstances was this. Miss Elkington broke off her engagement to Sherwin and married Kort. A few months afterwards the husband and wife left Vienna under extraordinary circumstances. These circumstances are not divulged. It is certain that Kort had done something in the highest degree discreditable if not felonious. There were, it appears, three people who knew his secret—his own wife, Philip Sherwin, and poor Ridley. As we know, Ridley died under, to say the least of it, suspicious circumstances. Sherwin has also died; there is now only the wife whose lips Kort by some fiendish means has sealed."

"But," I interrupted, "if any such danger were to be apprehended from his wife's speaking, and he is the black villain we have every reason to believe him to be, why has he not made an attempt on her life?"

"That I cannot tell you. There is no doubt a reason why he does not dare to kill her. From our interviews it is evident that she is under the influence of some terrible fear. Our only chance is to see her when her husband and maid are out of the house, and the cause of terror, whatever it may be, withdrawn."

"But that will be impossible," I replied. "If things are as you suggest, he will take very good care not to leave her."

Chetwynd put his hand to his brow with a restless gesture.

"That is so," he answered, slowly. "We are indeed beset with difficulties. I wish I could learn what special business Kort is now transacting with that rascally lawyer Myerstein. I have inquired about him, and he bears a character, to say the least, shady. If we knew that we might get a clue. Well, I have done my best, and yet, now that I review all, we seem to have got no further. If we could only get the slightest idea of what this business is between Myerstein and Kort our way might be clear."

"Kort told me," I replied, "that he was leaving here on Friday, that is to-morrow morning. He further said that his affairs in connection with the Club were being wound up by Myerstein, and that Myerstein would communicate with us on the matter."

"There is more behind," said Chetwynd. "I wish I knew; I earnestly wish I knew."

"Kort wrote to Myerstein by the post which left here soon after four o'clock," I said, suddenly.

"He did? I would give my hand to see that communication. How do you know he has written?"

"I saw the letter when the servant brought me the post bag."

Chetwynd lay back in his chair and clasped one of his hands across his eyes. The silence lasted a long time, so long that at first I thought my friend had fallen asleep; but a glance at him and the taut tendons of his hand clasped across his eyes told me that he was thinking long and deeply.

"Cato," he said, at last.

"Well?" I replied.

"Are you prepared in the cause of that unhappy woman to play a daring, underhand game, as well as to commit an indictable offence?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"There is no help for it," said my friend. He sprang suddenly to his feet. His face was all alive, his eyes shone with intense excitement. "We have got but two hours," he added, "if we do not succeed now all is lost."

"Explain yourself," I said.

"We must get possession of the letter which has been posted to Myerstein this afternoon."

"My dear fellow," I exclaimed, "that really is impossible."

"It is not impossible, but it is of course improbable, and we shall be running a great risk; but in view of the tremendous issues at stake, and the almost certainty that the letter contains a clue which would put the position into our hands, it is worth the

attempt My conscience allows me to make it. Will you come with me, and will you join me?"

"I dislike the thought of it," I said. "Hitherto, we at least have been——"

"Oh, pooh!" interrupted Chetwynd, "there are times when a man must sacrifice his so-called honour The woman upstairs demands that of us. She is Kort's dupe, his victim, she must be rescued. I am not ashamed of what I mean to do. Will you join me or not?"

"I will join you," I said, slowly

"Then stay here till I come back Time is short. It is a quarter to eight now. I will return as soon as ever I can."

He hurried out of the room, leaving me alone. I rang the bell and told the servant who appeared that neither Dr. Chetwynd nor I would be able to be present at dinner.

"Ask Mr Kort from me to take the head of the table," I continued.

The man received my message, bowed, and withdrew I spent the time of Chetwynd's absence pacing up and down the room. At half past eight he returned with a small, black bag

"Come now, quickly," he said, "we must have a hansom I have got the address. It is number thirty-eight, Gledham Gardens, South Kensington"

"Tell me, what is your scheme?" I asked

"A bold and risky one. You shall soon know"

Outside we hailed the nearest hansom.

"South Kensington Museum," whispered Chetwynd to the driver, "and a sovereign to yourself if you do it in three-quarters of an hour"

The man nodded and away we sped at a spanking trot.

"We will get out at the Museum and walk the rest of the way," said Chetwynd "I find the letter will be delivered at half-past nine We shall be just in time."

He made no further remark till we alighted close to the Oratory. He then paid the man and we hurried off in the direction of Gledham Gardens.

"Are you going to bribe the postman?" I asked.

"No, hush! we are here." As he spoke we turned the corner of a large square, in the centre of which stood the usual garden.

"That is the house," he said, pointing in a certain direction He glanced at his watch. "Twenty minutes past nine Stand here and wait for me in the shade of this tree," he continued He crossed the road and went up the steps of number thirty-eight to the hall door, where he stood for a minute or two. Then he again crossed the road and waited in the shade of the garden Several people passed, and a policeman on his beat went slowly by. Chetwynd never stirred, and I watched him wondering. A double knock at a door close by caused me to start and turn round The postman delivering the last post at the various houses was coming down the road Outside number thirty-eight he stopped for a moment or two, drew some letters from his bag, glanced at them, ran up the steps, put them in the letter box, and came down again The moment he did so

"BOUND HERE, QUICK!"

Chetwynd glided softly across the road and ran up the steps of the house. In less than a minute he was hurrying towards me.

"Round here, quick!" he said, catching my arm, and drawing me down a turning.

"What in the name of Heaven have you been doing?" I said.

"I have got it," he answered, as he raised his hand to a crawling four-wheeler. Directly we were inside he drew forth, to my utter amazement, the same letter which I had seen go into the post a few hours back.

"One moment before we read it, Cato," he said. He opened his little bag and took out a strange-looking sort of black silk pouch—the orifice oblong, and held in that shape by a band of copper wire.

"My post-bag," he whispered, "my own little patent post bag, very simple. I passed this through the flap of Mr. Myerstein's letter-box, leaving these two little black silk threads hanging out and quite invisible. The postman put in his letters, four altogether, this one and three others. I then drew out my bag by the silk threads—it of course contained the letters. I removed the one and returned the others. Cato, we are thieves, but upon my word it is a lucky *coup*. There was just the chance of course of a servant happening to be in the hall. This I had to risk, but we are safe, I have succeeded. Now for the contents."

I had scarcely time to recognise the subtle ingenuity of his plot before he had torn open the envelope and glanced at the contents.

"By Jove!" he cried, "see here!"

I bent forward and in breathless excitement glanced over the page. It contained the following words —

"Just a line to say all well. She did not dare to speak. Don't forget 11 45 to-night. Burn this. H. K."

"You see it is to-night, whatever it is," I said. "My theory is right; there is a double game playing. We must get back with all possible speed. We must be in time to prevent the catastrophe, whatever it may be. There is no stopping now. We must act on this letter."

We left the four-wheeler, got into a hansom, and, offering the driver anything he wished to ask, told him to take us with all possible speed to the Sanctuary Club. The horse was a good one, and it was scarcely half-past ten when we dashed in through the gates.

"Straight up; we will take the bull by the horns," exclaimed Chetwynd, and we both raced up the stairs. In the corridor which led to the Davos suite we met Kort, evidently coming from his wife's rooms. Chetwynd immediately stepped up to him.

"Cato and I wish to see your wife at once," he said. "We will take no denial; we must see her now without an instant's delay."

"You cannot," replied Kort. He quickly retreated and stood before the door. His face was livid with suppressed fear.

"Stand aside, Mr. Kort," I said, briefly; "your game is up."

"You are both mad," he almost shouted, quivering with fury. "I tell you if you enter that room her death will be on your hands."

Chetwynd pushed him aside and laid his hand on the hasp of the outer door.

"All right, go!" cried Kort. He sprang suddenly aside and shot down the corridor.

We opened the door and entered the anteroom, but before we reached the inner door a rush of air through the valves fell on our ears. We dashed into Mrs. Kort's room. She was standing in the middle of the floor, her eyes were fixed on the door by which we entered, but I do not think she saw either of us. She was breathing quickly and clutching her head with both hands. Suddenly, with a hoarse cry she fell to the floor, struggling and writhing as if in a death agony, her features twitched and her left hand clutched convulsively at her head. In an instant we were both kneeling beside her. With her hand she pulled aside a mass of her thick black hair, and a loud cry burst from Chetwynd's lips. What he had seen I did not know. He cried out —

"The lever! the lever! Go and exhaust, man. She is dying, quick!"

I sprang to the door, closed it, and rushed downstairs into the room where stood the great lever that worked the exhaust apparatus. In five minutes the sweat was pouring from every pore in my body. I knew nothing save that a life hung on my efforts, nor did I cease working the great lever till the mercury in the barometer stood at fifteen inches. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"Well done! You have saved her."

I looked into Chetwynd's eyes, and their expression froze the blood at my heart.

"I said before that Kort was a fiend," he continued, "but my wildest dreams never guessed the depths of his iniquity. Come."

"What is wrong? Can you not explain?" I cried.

"There is no time yet, I will tell you presently. Watch this lever," he continued,

turning to two men servants who had followed him. "If anyone approaches it or attempts to tamper with it, keep him off and send for us."

We both returned to the Davos suite. We entered Mrs. Kort's sitting-room. She was there and alone. Someone had raised her from the floor. She was lying on a sofa. Her face was utterly white and exhausted. When she saw us she stretched out both her hands.

"I am better; I can breathe again," she said.

"The danger is past now," said Chetwynd; "but stay quiet, do not attempt to speak."

"But am I safe? Has he gone?"

"You are quite safe," answered Chetwynd.

She gave a deep sigh.

"I can live," she said, in a low voice, "the agony is over, but I nearly died."

"It was touch and go," said Chetwynd, briefly, "but never mind, do not say anything just yet."

She closed her eyes. In a moment or two she opened them.

"He tried it once before," she said, in a dreamy voice, "once when I would not do what he wished. It was soon after my marriage, when Philip Sherwin threatened to expose him."

Again she closed her eyes, she seemed too weak for further conversation.

"We will not disturb her for a few moments," said Chetwynd to me, "she has gone through agony which only she can fathom."

"But what about Kort?" I inquired. "Is he likely to come back? Is he likely to do her a further injury?"

"He must have seen that his game was up and has probably left the Club," was Chetwynd's answer, "but if you will stay here with Mrs. Kort I will go and inquire." He went out of the room. In a few moments he returned with a strong restorative in his hand.

"I guessed aright, the man has already left the Club," he said, looking at me, then kneeling beside Mrs. Kort he slightly raised her head. "Drink this off," he said, "you will be better afterwards." He held the glass to her lips. She drained the contents to the last drop and then sat up on her sofa.

"Oh, I am much better," she said, with a deep sigh, "much stronger."

"You need not fear your husband's return," said Chetwynd then, "we have taken measures to secure you against the recurrence of the horrible torture to which he has just subjected you. Why he did this horrible deed we have yet to learn, but you need fear no repetition of it."

"Has he left the house?" she asked.

"Yes, he will never come near you again, Mrs. Kort. Dr. Cato and I are both determined men, and we would give our lives to help you. Now may tell us all you can of your most miserable story."

She looked full at us, the pupils of her eyes began to darken, she breathed more quietly, then she sat up once more on her sofa.

"I will tell you," she said. "Something seems to assure me that the danger is over, it will be a relief to speak."

Neither Chetwynd nor I said a word. She began the recital of her terrible wrongs in a low voice.

"Five years ago I married Mr. Kort in

Vienna. I was studying medicine there at the time. I had always a great love for science, and for medical science in particular. I was thought clever, I had brains, and I longed to use them. I was particularly interested in everything which related to psychological research. The relation of mind to matter was a problem to which I hoped to devote my life. When I first met Mr. Kort I was engaged to a man whom I then sincerely loved, and who most passionately loved me. His name was Philip Sherwin."

Neither Chetwynd nor I spoke a word. She looked up at us with a half questioning glance, and then continued:—

"I was engaged to him—would that I had married him! Since then he has died."

"He died in this house," I said, slowly.

"Ah! you know about him," she exclaimed. "Of course, I heard that he died here. You will tell me of his last hours presently."

"We will," said Chetwynd, "but pray proceed now with your own story, it is of paramount importance for the time being."

She went on quietly.

"Mr. Kort had a wonderful manner, a strange and overpowering fascination. He soon exercised an extraordinary influence over me. He often talked to me on the subject which interested us both. How each pearly cell in the brain, to the sight the merest protoplasm, is really the agent through which the lives, thoughts, and emotions of all humanity are manifested, and in which the greatest sacrifices, renunciations, vices, and virtues have their origin. One day he asked me if I would be his wife. I told him that I was engaged to Philip Sherwin. That fact seemed not to affect him in the least. He pursued his attentions, and one night in the presence of several friends he mesmerized me. After that my will seemed weakened, he put me into the mesmeric trance from time to time, and at last I was completely in his power. I gave up the man to whom I was engaged for the other man who had completely won what I supposed was my heart. I thought of no one but him. He had so transformed my nature that Mr. Sherwin's most passionate appeals had not the slightest effect upon me. It did not seem to me a sin to break his heart. I little knew to what all this was leading up. Mr. Kort and I were married, and a month or two later my husband gave me a glimpse into his true mind. I had always thought that his love of science was one of the strongest motives of his nature. I now saw that there was something else even stronger. He was intensely, cruelly ambitious. He wanted to be a great discoverer; he wished his name to be handed down to the race as the man who had proved one of the most abstruse and, to my thinking, appalling theories that ever dawned upon the human mind. He told me on one special awful night that it was his belief that every thought or motion arises, not from a spiritual source, but merely from a physical change in certain cells in the brain. He said it would be possible to prove this by stimulating these cells, so that character, moral sense, even conscience itself, and all that had hitherto been accepted as belonging to the spiritual part of our nature, would be really at the mercy of the physiologist. He said this could only be proved by experiment, that such an experiment could not be tried on the animal world, but only on a human subject. I listened to him with horror at his words, but still without following their main adrift.

"'Then thank God you can never prove your theory,' was my remark.

"'Do you say so?' he answered, and he fixed his eyes on my face. 'I can by experiment on a human subject.'

"I turned from him when he said this, with a sense of sudden and sick fear. We were both in his laboratory. I rose and attempted to leave the room. He called me back in that voice which I was powerless to resist.

"'You can be that subject,' he said, and he put his hands on my shoulders and looked into my eyes.

"'I! Never! Never! Are you mad?' was my reply.

"'I am not mad, I am sane. I repeat my words. You can be my subject.'

"There was an expression in his eyes which drove me to my knees.

"'What do you mean?' I cried. 'You terrify me, you frighten me. You would not hurt me, your wife? Oh, Horace! give this ghastly thing up! Leave it in the secret rooms of God's treasure house. We are better off with the old beliefs.'

"He laughed a cruel laugh.

"'Come, Isobel,' he said, 'I have not mesmerized you for a long time, I mean to do so now.'

"I cried aloud in my terror. He held both my hands and stooping looked into my eyes. I struggled against his influence. I think I screamed, then memory and sensation faded and I remembered nothing more. When I came to myself all was changed. I felt sick and bewildered, and with great difficulty could

recall what had happened before I had sunk to sleep. My husband was in the room with me. He was holding both my hands and telling me to keep calm. After a time I found to my horror that I was wearing a small metal cap on a part of my head. I asked him what it meant and he told me.

"'I have made the experiment on you, Isobel,' he said. 'To you is given the honour of being the means of proving the most marvellous theory in all the world. For the purpose of my experiment I was obliged to trephine a certain portion of your skull. I was not able to bring you back to consciousness after the operation, and only succeeded in doing so by preventing the normal atmospheric pressure of fifteen pounds to the square inch from pressing upon your brain. The exhaust cup which you are wearing relieves that pressure, and as long as you wear it your life is safe.'

"'But am I never to be well again?' I asked.

"'That depends,' he answered, and he gave a cruel smile.

"Time went on, but there was no improvement in my condition. Once I tried myself to remove the exhausted metallic cup. I immediately fainted, and should have died had my husband not rapidly replaced it. But even when wearing it my memory often failed me. About a month after my husband's awful experiment we made the acquaintance of a certain Mr. Charles Ridley. He often came to see us, and my husband and he became great friends. On the occasion of one of his visits I suddenly fainted in his presence. He was alone with me, and I never could tell what he discovered or what he did not. My husband rushed into the room and soon put me right, but after that I knew that Mr. Ridley suspected my husband.

"A few weeks went by, when one day Philip Sherwin, the man whom I had once loved and so cruelly deserted, burst into my presence. He told me that Mr. Ridley had spoken to him; that he had put two and two together and knew all. He said that my husband was in reality a murderer. He uttered words which really opened my eyes. He declared that he meant to proclaim my husband's infamy to all the world. Into the midst of this scene Horace himself entered. He spoke quietly, kept his temper, and presently got Mr. Sherwin to leave me. What followed that night I find almost impossible to describe. My husband had me completely in his power both soul and body.

"'Sherwin must hold his tongue,' he said. 'As to Ridley, he does not know all. He has not got Sherwin's scientific knowledge, and can never absolutely guess at the truth; but with Sherwin to aid him the thing will be common talk. I shall be ruined, I shall never be able to complete my discovery. I am desperate and would stop at nothing. You, Isobel, must wring a promise from him. If he does not swear to you that he will never reveal what he knows I will remove the metallic cup.'

"As he spoke I looked into his eyes and read my fate.

"'What is your life?' he said. 'What is the life of any woman, any man, compared to the knowledge which through you I am gradually obtaining? I shall be the greatest

"I LOOKED INTO HIS EYES AND READ MY FATE

psychological discoverer of my day. You must do what I wish and at once.'

"I yielded to his demands, for terror made me. I saw Philip and begged of him, because of our old love, to remain silent. I do not know how I spoke or how I argued, but, at last, driven to despair by my entreaties, he made the promise. Until I gave him leave he would not betray my husband.

"A week afterwards Horace and I left Vienna. We went at once to Davos. When there, to my great astonishment, I became perfectly well, strong, and vigorous. I was not even obliged to wear the cup, and I much rejoiced at being able to do without it. My husband was more kind than he had been. I began to feel almost my usual health, but as soon as I went down into the valleys the oppression, loss of memory, and faintness returned. One day my husband told me that he had heard of your Club. He said that by special mechanical arrangements an artificial suite of rooms had been made here in which the atmospheric pressure could be kept the same as that of the mountain air at Davos. My husband was extremely anxious to become one of your partners. I had a few thousand pounds which my father left me. He asked me if I would give it to him in order that he might buy a share in the Sanctuary Club. This I was willing to do, as I wanted to return to England. He then brought me to England, and eventually I came here; but although I could live in comparative comfort in the Davos suite, the horror of my mind can never be described. More and more, day after day, my eyes were opened to the brutal character of the man to whom I had been united. He never minded what he said to me, and always explained his plans and intentions, assuring me as he watched my face that nothing was better for the success of his experiments than the manner in which I received them. Thus I knew all about him and all about his victims. It was he who incited Mr Bamfylde to break the Prince Rupert's Drop, thus causing his death, while my husband rushed into the room in the dark and removed the jewel. Then most unexpectedly Mr Charles Ridley appeared upon the scene. He knew enough about my husband's secret to make things unpleasant for him. My husband therefore devised his ruin and then his death. He put atropine into the bottle which contained the soda-water. Some of the contents got into the jockey's eyes with the usual result, a temporary paralysis of the pupils of the eyes. The jockey could not guide his horse, and thus the race was lost and Mr. Ridley ruined. But this was not enough. The next day the unfortunate man was supposed to have died by suicide. This was not the case. My husband shot him and proved an *alibi* in a most cunning way. On the previous day he himself took the photograph which, as you remember, saved him, and he put the plate into Mr. Ridley's camera in order that it should appear that Mr. Ridley had taken the photograph at a certain hour. It had in reality been taken twenty-four hours earlier, and Mr. Ridley had not taken any photograph that morning.

"Once again, it was my miserable husband who was in league with Mr Sutherland to get the insurance money on the life of Harold Beauchamp. It was he who administered the poison to Mr Beauchamp, and Mr Sutherland and he were to divide the spoils between them. This scheme, as you know, failed owing to Dr Chetwynd's genius. Mr Sutherland, getting news of the removal of the ashes from Woking, committed suicide in terror, and my husband afterwards forged his confession, thus exonerating himself from all blame. Yes, few men have been so wicked, and the extraordinary thing is that he should have confided in me in the way he did, but he felt certain of my silence, knowing what the consequences would be to myself if I ever revealed the truth. There were moments, however, when I was so mad with misery and anguish, that I determined to risk all in order to let you know; but he invariably prevented me, and at last, seeing that I would creep away from my prison whenever I got the chance, he removed the cup. After this, my position became too awful. I was confined a close prisoner in my own rooms. My maid, Susan, was, of course, in his pay, and was in some ways a worse tyrant than even my husband himself. You have wondered, I dare say, why I did not send for you, why I did not speak. I dared not; I was in the utmost danger. My maid would have been listening by means of a tube which my husband had himself inserted into the wall between this room and my bedroom. She was ready the moment she heard me utter a word of our ghastly secret to communicate with him. He was then to release the valve and I should fall dead in this room. Now you know all. When you two forced your way in here an hour ago my husband saw that all was up, but at any cost he would seal my lips. He released the valve. But for Dr Cato's quickness I should have been a dead woman."

She paused. For a time Chetwynd and I were silent, rooted to the spot by this horrible tale. Chetwynd was the first to speak; he turned to me.

"Stay with her, Cato, I must not waste a moment in loosing the hounds on Kort; he cannot have got far yet. He did not count on my inspiration when I sent you to the lever just in time."

"No, he thought the grave would cover the most ghastly part of his secret," was my answer, "but all is up with him now. Don't lose a moment, Chetwynd. That man must suffer the full penalty of his crimes."

Chetwynd went away. Two or three hours afterwards he came back. I was still in Mrs. Kort's room. She was lying on the sofa, her eyes closed. What her thoughts were I could not say. He handed me a telegram which he had just received. It was from Inspector Clarkson. "Have arrested Horace Kort at Southampton."

"Thank God!" was my exclamation.

"The law will punish him," said my friend. "We will leave him for the present to his God and to the law of the land. I want to talk to you about someone else." As he spoke he looked at Mrs. Kort.

"I am sending a nurse to look after you," he said; "your husband has left the Club and your wicked maid has also vanished. You need never fear seeing either of them again."

We went into the anteroom, as we did not like to leave Mrs. Kort too long alone.

"Can anything be done for her?" I asked.

"I hope so," he answered, briefly, "but do you know what has occurred?"

"I can partly guess, but I have not examined the skull."

"I have," he answered. "A portion of the right parietal bone has been depressed, which, as of course you know, would in ordinary circumstances cause all the symptoms of compression of the brain, stupor, lethargy, passing into coma, which unless relieved passes into death. To relieve this at the time was simple enough. Kort had

"CHETWYND EXPLAINED EVERYTHING TO HER."

merely to raise the bone and keep it raised till it had united with the surrounding bone. This he did not do, for it would have foiled his purpose and made experiments impossible, and so long as this state of things persisted, the ordinary atmospheric pressure would cause the natural train of symptoms of compression. But under a minus pressure, such as in our Davos suite, or under an

apparatus locally applied, such as the metallic cup, Mrs. Kort would be well, as the portion of the bone would be raised and the pressure relieved."

"But what about the unhappy girl now? Is she to be a prisoner all the rest of her days?" I cried.

"We must do what we can for her," answered Chetwynd, "but the condition of things is formidable. Our only chance is to raise the semi-detached bone, break away the callus that has formed, in order to give a fresh surface for healing, and trust to nature to unite it to the surrounding bone. The Davos rooms are excellently suited for our purpose, and she can remain there during convalescence. Then in a few weeks, if all goes well, we will gradually let in more and more atmospheric pressure and see how the bone stands it. If it has united and she suffers no uncomfortable symptoms, she can step out into the world a free woman."

"Will you undertake it?" I cried. "It will be the crowning triumph of your life."

"If she gives her consent," answered Chetwynd.

That evening we had another interview with Mrs. Kort. Chetwynd explained everything to her with the utmost fulness.

"With your medical knowledge you must understand what we mean," he said. "I will undertake the operation, and Cato will give you chloroform, provided you are willing; but I must frankly tell you that the danger is great, you may never come out of it alive."

"But if I do?" she asked, raising those wonderful sapphire eyes to his.

"If all goes well," he replied, "and I firmly believe and hope that all will go well, you will be a free woman once more."

"Then I consent," she answered. "How soon will you give me back my liberty?"

"To-morrow morning," said Chetwynd.

The operation was performed, and proved a complete success. In three weeks Mrs. Kort was convalescent. We gradually let in the atmospheric pressure. She showed no signs of distress, and came out of her prison well and eternally grateful. Nevertheless, a curious thing had happened. As she went into that awful prison house she did not return. She was a changed woman—strong and blooming, no doubt, but without any memory of the awful thing which had happened to her. Never from the day of her recovery has she been heard to inquire for her husband or to mention his name. All the memory of that fearful time in her life was blotted out as if it had never existed.

This was indeed well, for Kort was brought to trial and received the extreme penalty of the law for his awful crimes.

As to the maid, the police failed to find her, and she has doubtless long since left England.

Kort is dead. He lies in his dishonoured grave, and the world is all the better for his removal. But the Sanctuary Club lives and flourishes. Mrs. Kort is still a member, and the most invaluable help to Chetwynd and myself. Her lost memory she will never get again, but her wit, her brightness, and her beauty are the delight and surprise of all who come to the Club.

CONCLUSION

KIND LITTLE EDMUND,

OR THE CAVES AND THE COCKATRICE

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY E. NESBIT

EDMUND was a boy. The people who did not like him said that he was the most tiresome boy that ever lived, but his grandmother and his other friends said he had an inquiring mind. And his granny often added that he was the best of boys. But she was very kind and very old.

Edmund loved to find out about things. Perhaps you will think that in that case he was constant in his attendance at school, since there, if anywhere, we may learn whatever there is to be learned. But Edmund did not want to learn things—he wanted to find things out, which is quite different. His inquiring mind led him to take clocks to pieces to see what made them go, to take locks off doors to see what made them stick. It was Edmund who cut open the india-rubber ball to see what made it bounce, and he never *did* see, any more than you did when you tried the same experiment.

Edmund lived with his grandmother. She loved him very much—in spite of his inquiring mind, and hardly scolded him at all when he frizzled up her tortoiseshell comb in his anxiety to find out whether it was made of real tortoiseshell or of something that would burn. Edmund went to school, of course, now and then, and sometimes he could not prevent himself from learning something, but he never did it on purpose.

"It is such waste of time," said he, "they only know what everybody knows. I want to find out new things that nobody has thought of but me."

"I don't think you're likely to find out anything that none of the wise men in the whole world have thought of all these thousands of years," said granny.

But Edmund did not agree with her. He played truant whenever he could, for he was a kind-hearted boy, and could not bear to think of a master's time and labour being thrown away on a boy like himself, who did not wish to learn, only to find out—when there were so many worthy lads thirsting for instruction in geography and history, and reading and ciphering, and Mr. Smiles's Self-Help.

Other boys played truant too, of course—and these went nutting or blackberrying or wild plum gathering, but Edmund never went on the side of the town where the green woods and hedges grew. He always went up the mountain where the great rocks were, and the tall, dark pine trees, and where other people were afraid to go because of the strange noises that came out of the caves.

Edmund was not afraid of these noises—though they were very strange and terrible. He wanted to find out what made them. And one day he did. He had invented, all by himself, a very ingenious and new kind of lantern, made with a turnip and a tumbler, and when he had taken the candle out of granny's bedroom candlestick to put in it, it gave quite a splendid light.

He had to go to school next day, and he was caned for being absent without leave—although he very straightforwardly explained that he had been too busy making the lantern to have time to come to school.

But the day after he got up very early, and took the lunch granny had got ready for him to take to school—two boiled eggs and an apple turnover—and he took his lantern and went off as straight as a dart to the mountains to explore the caves.

The caves were very dark, but his lantern lighted them up beautifully; and they were most interesting caves, with stalactites and stalagmites and fossils, and all the things you read about in the instructive books for the young. But Edmund did not care for any of these things just then. He wanted to find out what made the noises that people were afraid of, and there was nothing in the caves to tell him.

Presently he sat down in the biggest cave and listened very carefully, and it seemed to him that he could distinguish three different sorts of noises. There was a heavy, rumbling sound, like a very large old gentleman asleep after dinner; and there was a smaller sort of rumble going on at the same time, and there was a sort of crowing, clucking sound, such as a chicken might make if it happened to be as big as a haystack.

"It seems to me," said Edmund to himself, "that the clucking is nearer than the others." So he started up again and explored the caves once more. He found out nothing, only, about half-way up the wall of the cave, he saw a hole. And, being a boy, he climbed up to it and crept in; and it was the entrance to a rocky passage. And now the clucking sounded more plainly than before, and he could hardly hear the rumbling at all.

"I am going to find out something at last," said Edmund, and on he went. The passage wound and twisted, and twisted and turned, and turned and wound—but Edmund kept on.

"My lantern's burning better and better," said he presently, but the next minute he saw that all the light did not come from his lantern. It was a pale yellow light, and it shone down the passage far ahead of him through what looked like the chink of a door.

"I expect it's the fire in the middle of the earth," said Edmund, who had not been able to help learning about that at school.

But quite suddenly the fire ahead gave a pale flicker and went down—and the clucking ceased.

The next moment Edmund turned a corner and found himself in front of a rocky door. The door was ajar. He went in, and there was a round cave, like the dome of St. Paul's. In the middle of the cave was a hole like a very big wash hand basin, and in the middle of the basin Edmund saw a large pale person sitting. This person had a man's face and a griffin's body, and big, feathery wings, and a snake's tail, and a cock's comb and neck-feathers.

"Whatever are you?" said Edmund.

"I'm a poor starving cockatrice," answered the pale person, in a very faint voice, "and I shall die—oh, I know I shall! My fire's gone out! I can't think how it happened; I must have been asleep. I have to stir it seven times round with my tail once in a hundred years to keep it alight, and my watch must have been wrong. And now I shall die."

I think I have said before what a kind-hearted boy Edmund was.

"Cheer up," said he. "I'll light your fire for you," and off he went, and in a few minutes he came back with a great armful of sticks from the pine trees outside, and with these and a lesson book or two that he had forgotten to lose before, and which, quite by an oversight, were safe in his pocket, he lighted a fire all round the cockatrice. The wood blazed up, and presently something in the basin caught fire, and Edmund saw that it was a sort of liquid that burned like the brandy in a snapdragon. And now the cockatrice stirred it with his tail, and flapped his wings in it, so that some of it splashed out on Edmund's hand and burnt it rather badly. But the cockatrice grew red and strong and happy, and its comb grew scarlet, its feathers glossy, and it lifted itself up and crowed, "Cock-a-trice-a doodle-doo!" very loudly and clearly.

COCK A TRICE A THREE DOG."

Edmund's kindly nature was charmed to see the cockatrice so much improved in health, and he said—

"Don't mention it, delighted, I'm sure," when the cockatrice began to thank him.

"But what can I do for you?" said the creature.

"Tell me stories," said Edmund.

"What about?" said the cockatrice.

"About true things that they don't know at school," said Edmund.

So the cockatrice began, and it told him about mines and treasures, and geological formations, and about gnomes and fairies and dragons, and glaciers and the stone age, and the beginning of the world, and about the unicorn and the phœnix, and about Magic, black and white.

And Edmund ate his eggs and his turn over, and listened. And when he got hungry again he said good-bye and went home. But he came again next day for more stories, and the next day, and the next, for a long time.

He told the boys at school about the cockatrice and its wonderful true tales, and the boys liked the stories; but when he told the master he was caned for untruthfulness.

"But it's true," said Edmund; "just you look where the fire burnt my hand."

"I see you've been playing with fire—in mischief as usual," said the master, and he caned Edmund harder than ever. The master was ignorant and unbelieving; but I am told that some schoolmasters are not like that.

Now, one day Edmund made a new lantern out of something chemical which he sneaked from the school laboratory. And with it he went exploring again to see if he could find the things that made the other sorts of noises. And in quite another part of the mountain he found a dark passage, all lined with brass, so that it was like the inside of a huge telescope, and at the very end of it he found a bright green door. There was a brass plate on the door which said "Mrs. D. knock and ring," and a white label which said "Call me at three." Edmund had a watch it had been given to him on his birthday two days before, and he had not yet had time to take it to pieces and see what made it go, so it was still going. He looked at it now. It said—

"A quarter to three."

Did I tell you before what a kind-hearted boy Edmund was? He sat down on the brass door-step and waited till three o'clock. Then he knocked and rang, and there was a rattling and puffing inside. The great door flew open, and Edmund had only just time to hide behind it when out came an immense yellow dragon and wriggled off down the

brass cave like a long, rattling worm—or perhaps more like a monstrous centipede.

Edmund crept slowly out, and saw the dragon stretching herself on the rocks in the sun, and he crept past the great creature and tore down the hill into the town and burst into school, crying out —

"There's a great dragon coming! Somebody ought to do something, or we shall all be destroyed."

He was caned for untruthfulness without any delay. His master was never one for postponing a duty.

"But it's *true*," said Edmund, "you just see if it isn't."

He pointed out of the window, and everyone could see a vast yellow cloud rising up into the air above the mountain.

"It's only a thunder shower," said the master, and caned Edmund more than ever. This master was not like some masters I know: he was very obstinate, and would not believe his own eyes if they told him anything different to what he had been saying before his eyes spoke.

So while the master was writing, "Lying is very wrong, and liars must be caned. It is all for their own good," on the black board for Edmund to copy out seven hundred times, Edmund sneaked out of school, and ran for his life across the town to warn his granny, but she was not at home. So then he made off by the back door of the town, and raced up the hill to tell the cockatrice, and ask for its help. It never occurred to him that the cockatrice might not believe him. You see, he had heard so many wonderful tales from it and had believed them all—and when you believe all a person's stories they ought to believe yours. This is only fair.

At the mouth of the cockatrice's cave Edmund stopped, very much out of breath, to look back at the town. As he ran he had felt his little legs tremble and shake, while the shadows of the great yellow cloud fell upon him. Now he stood once more between warm earth and blue sky, and looked down on the green plain, dotted with fruit trees and red-roofed farms and plots of gold corn. In the middle of that plain the grey town lay, with its strong walls, with the holes pierced for the archers, and its square towers with holes in for dropping melted lead on the heads of strangers, its bridges, and its steeples, the quiet river edged with willow and alder, and the pleasant green garden-place in the middle of the town, where people sat on holidays to smoke their pipes and listen to the band.

Edmund saw it all; and he saw, too, creeping across the plain, marking her way by a black line, as everything withered at her touch, the great yellow dragon—and he saw that she was many times bigger than the whole town.

"CREEPING ACROSS THE PLAIN"

"Oh, my poor, dear granny," said Edmund, for he had a feeling heart, as I ought to have told you before.

The yellow dragon crept nearer and nearer, licking her greedy lips with her long, red tongue, and Edmund knew that in the school his master was still teaching earnestly, and still not believing Edmund's tale the least little bit.

"He'll jolly well *have* to believe it soon, anyhow," said Edmund to himself—and though he was a very tender hearted boy—I think it only fair to tell you that he was this—I am afraid he was not so sorry as he ought to have been to think of the way in which his master was going to learn how to believe what Edmund said. Then the dragon opened her jaws wider and wider and wider. Edmund shut his eyes close, for though his master *was* in the town, yet the amiable Edmund shrank from beholding the awful sight.

When he opened his eyes again there was no town—only a bare place where it had stood, and the dragon licking her lips and curling herself up to go to sleep, just as pussy does when she has quite finished with a mouse. Edmund gasped once or twice, and then ran into the cave to tell the cockatrice.

"Well," said the cockatrice, thoughtfully, when the tale had been told, "what then?"

"I don't think you quite understand," said Edmund, gently; "the dragon has swallowed up the town."

"Does it matter?" said the cockatrice.

"But I live there," said Edmund, blankly.

"Never mind," said the cockatrice, turning over in the pool of fire to warm its other side, which was chilly, because Edmund had, as usual, forgotten to close the cave door, "you can live here with me."

"I'm afraid I haven't made my meaning clear," said Edmund, patiently. "You see, my granny is in the town, and I can't bear to lose my granny like this."

"I don't know what a granny may be," said the cockatrice, who seemed to be growing weary of the subject, "but if it's a possession to which you attach any importance——"

"Of course it is," said Edmund, losing patience at last. "Oh—do help me. What can I do?"

"If I were you," said his friend, stretching itself out in the pool of flame so that the waves covered it up to the chin, "I should find the drakling and bring it here."

"But why?" said Edmund. He had got into the habit of asking why at school, and the master had always found it trying. As for the cockatrice, it was not going to stand that sort of thing for a moment.

"Oh, don't talk to me!" it said, splashing angrily in the flames. "I give you advice; take it or leave it—I sha'n't bother about you any more. If you bring the drakling here to me, I'll tell you what to do next. If not, not."

And the cockatrice drew the fire up close round its shoulders, tucked itself up in it, and went to sleep.

Now this was exactly the right way to manage Edmund, only no one had ever thought of trying to do it before.

He stood for a moment looking at the cockatrice; it looked at him out of the corner of its eye, and began to snore very loud, and Edmund understood, once and for all, that it wasn't going to put up with any nonsense. He respected the cockatrice very much from that moment, and set off at once to do exactly as he was told—for perhaps the first time in his life.

Though he had played truant so often, he knew one or two things that perhaps you don't know, though you have always been so good and gone to school regularly. For instance, he knew that a drakling is a dragon's baby, and he felt sure that what he had to do was to find the third of the three noises that people used to hear coming from the mountains. Of course, the clucking had been the cockatrice, and the big noise like a large gentleman asleep after dinner had been the big dragon. So the smaller rumbling must have been the drakling.

He plunged boldly into the caves, and searched and wandered and wandered and searched, and at last he came to a third door in the mountain, and on it was written, "The baby is asleep." Just before the door stood fifty pairs of copper shoes, and no one could have looked at them for a moment without seeing what sort of feet they were made for, for each shoe had five holes in it for the drakling's five claws. And there were fifty pairs, because the drakling took after his mother, and had a hundred feet—no more and no less. He was the kind called *Draco centipedis* in the learned books.

Edmund was a good deal frightened, but he remembered the grim expression of the cockatrice's eye, and the fixed determination of its snore still rang in his ears, in spite of the snoring of the drakling, which was, in itself, considerable. He screwed up his

courage, flung the door open, and called out —

"Halloa, you drakling. Get out of bed this minute"

The drakling stopped snoring and said, sleepily, "It ain't time yet."

"Your mother says you are to, anyhow, and look sharp about it, what's more," said Edmund, gaining courage from the fact that the drakling had not yet eaten him.

The drakling sighed, and Edmund could hear it getting out of bed. The next moment it began to come out of its room and to put on its shoes. It was not nearly so big as its mother, only about the size of a Baptist chapel

"Hurry up," said Edmund, as it fumbled clumsily with the seventeenth shoe.

"Mother said I was never to go out without my shoes," said the drakling; so Edmund had to help it to put them on It took some time, and was not a comfortable occupation.

At last the drakling said it was ready, and Edmund, who had forgotten to be frightened, said, "Come on then," and they went back to the cockatrice.

The cave was rather narrow for the drakling, but it made itself thin, as you may see a fat worm do when it wants to get through a narrow crack in a piece of hard earth.

"Here it is," said Edmund, and the cockatrice woke up at once and asked the drakling very politely to sit down and wait. "Your mother will be here presently," said the cockatrice, stirring up its fire

The drakling sat down and waited, but it watched the fire with hungry eyes.

"I beg your pardon," it said at last, "but I am always accustomed to have a little basin of fire directly I get up, and I feel rather faint. Might I?"

It reached out a claw towards the cockatrice's basin.

"Certainly not," said the cockatrice, sharply; "where were you brought up? Did they never teach you that 'we must not ask for all we see'? Eh?"

"I beg your pardon," said the drakling, humbly, "but I am really very hungry"

The cockatrice beckoned Edmund to the side of the basin, and whispered in his ear so long and so earnestly that one side of the dear boy's hair was quite burnt off And he never once interrupted the cockatrice to ask why But when the whispering was over, Edmund—whose heart, as I may have mentioned, was very tender—said to the drakling —

"If you are really hungry, poor thing, I can show you where there is plenty of fire." And off he went through the caves, and the drakling followed.

When Edmund came to the proper place he stopped.

There was a round iron thing in the floor, like the ones the men shoot the coals down into your cellar, only much larger. Edmund heaved it up by a hook that stuck out at one side, and a rush of hot air came up that nearly choked him. But the drakling came close, and looked down with one eye, and sniffed, and said —

"That smells good, eh?"

"Yes," said Edmund, "well, that's the fire in the middle of the earth. There's

"THAT SMELLS GOOD, EH?"

plenty of it, all done to a turn. You'd better go down and begin your breakfast, hadn't you?"

So the drakling wriggled through the hole, and began to crawl faster and faster down the slanting shaft that leads to the fire in the middle of the earth. And Edmund, doing exactly as he had been told, for a wonder, caught the end of the drakling's tail, and ran the iron hook through it, so that the drakling was held fast. And it could not turn round and wriggle up again to look after its poor tail, because, as everyone knows, the way to the fires below is very easy to go down, but quite impossible to come back on. There is something about it in Latin, beginning "*Facilis descensus.*"

So there was the drakling, fast by the silly tail of it, and there was Edmund very busy and important, and very pleased with himself, hurrying back to the cockatrice.

"Now," said he.

"Well, now," said it, "go to the mouth of the cave and laugh at the dragon so that she hears you."

Edmund very nearly said, "Why?" but he stopped in time, and instead, said:—

"She won't hear me——"

"Oh, very well," said the cockatrice, "no doubt you know best," and it began to tuck itself up again in the fire, so Edmund did as he was bid.

And when he began to laugh his laughter echoed in the mouth of the cave till it sounded like the laughter of a whole castleful of giants.

And the dragon, lying asleep in the sun, woke up and said, very crossly:—

"What are you laughing at?"

"At you," said Edmund, and went on laughing. The dragon bore it as long as she could, but, like everyone else, she couldn't stand being made fun of—so presently she dragged herself up the mountain very slowly, because she had just had a rather heavy meal, and stood outside, and said, "What are you laughing at?" in a voice that made Edmund feel as if he should never laugh again.

Then the good cockatrice called out:—

"At *you!* You've eaten your own drakling—swallowed it with the town. Your own little drakling! He, he, he! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Edmund found courage to cry "Ha, ha!" which sounded like tremendous laughter in the echo of the cave.

"Dear me," said the dragon. "I thought the town stuck in my throat rather. I must take it out, and look through it more carefully." And with that he coughed—and choked—and there was the town on the hillside.

Edmund had run back to the cockatrice, and it had told him what to do. So before the dragon had time to look through the town again for her drakling, the voice of the drakling itself was heard howling miserably from inside the mountain, because Edmund was pinching its tail as hard as he could in the round iron door, like the one where the men pour the coals out of the sacks into the cellar. And the dragon heard the voice and said:—

"Why, whatever's the matter with baby? He's *not* here!" and made itself thin, and crept into the mountain to find its drakling. The cockatrice kept on laughing as loud as it could, and Edmund kept on pinching, and presently the great dragon—very long and narrow she had made herself—found her head where the round hole was with the iron lid. Her tail was a mile or two off—outside the mountain. When Edmund heard her coming he gave one last nip to the drakling's tail, and then heaved up the lid and stood behind it, so that the dragon could not see him. Then he loosed the drakling's tail from the hook, and the dragon peeped down the hole just in time to see her drakling's tail disappear down the smooth, slanting shaft with one last squeak of pain. Whatever may have been the poor dragon's other faults, she was an excellent mother. She plunged head first into the hole, and slid down the shaft after her baby. Edmund watched her head go—and then the rest of her. She was so long, now she had stretched herself thin, that it took all night. It was like watching a goods train go by in Germany. When the last joint of her tail had gone Edmund slammed down the iron door. He was a kind-hearted boy, as you have guessed, and he was glad to think that dragon and drakling would now have plenty to eat of their favourite food, for ever and ever. He thanked the cockatrice for its kindness, and got home just in time to have breakfast and get to school by nine. Of course, he could not have done this if the town had been in its old place by the river in the middle of the plain, but it had taken root on the hillside just where the dragon left it.

"Well," said the master, "where were you yesterday?"

Edmund explained, and the master at once caned him for not speaking the truth.

"But it *is* true," said Edmund. "Why,

"SHE SLID DOWN THE SHAFT AFTER HER BABY"

the whole town was swallowed by the dragon. You know it was——"

"Nonsense," said the master; "there was a thunderstorm and an earthquake, that's all."

And he caned Edmund more than ever.

"But," said Edmund, who always would argue, even in the least favourable circumstances, "how do you account for the town being on the hillside now, instead of by the river as it used to be?"

"It was *always* on the hillside," said the master. And all the class said the same, for they had more sense than to argue with a person who carried a cane.

"But look at the maps," said Edmund, who wasn't going to be beaten in argument, whatever he might be in the flesh. The master pointed to the map on the wall.

There was the town, *on the hillside!* And nobody but Edmund could see that of course the shock of being swallowed by the dragon had upset all the maps and put them wrong.

And then the master caned Edmund again, explaining that this time it was not for untruthfulness, but for his vexatious argumentative habits. This will show you what a prejudiced and ignorant man Edmund's master was — how different from the revered Head of the nice school where your good parents are kind enough to send you.

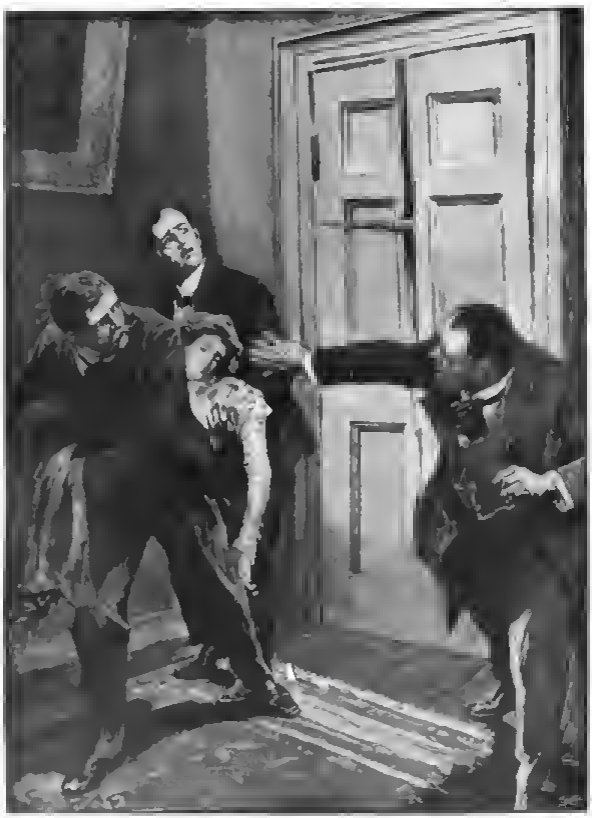
Next day Edmund thought he would prove his tale by showing people the cockatrice, and he actually persuaded some people to go into the cave with him; but the cockatrice had bolted itself in, and would not open the door—so Edmund got nothing by that except a scolding for taking people on a wild-goose chase.

"A wild goose," said they, "is nothing like a cockatrice."

And poor Edmund could not say a word, though he knew how wrong they were. The only person who believed him was his granny. But then she was very old and very kind, and had always said he was the best of boys.

Only one good thing came of all this long story. Edmund has never been quite the same boy since. He does not argue quite so much, and he agreed to be apprenticed to a locksmith, so that he might some day be able to pick the lock of the cockatrice's front door—and learn some more of the things that other people don't know.

But he is quite an old man now, and he hasn't got that door open yet!



"ANOTHER CRASH, AND SOMETHING SHOT THROUGH THE RIVEN DOOR."

(*See page 250.*)

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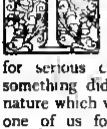
Playing with Fire.

By A. Conan Doyle.



CANNOT pretend to say what occurred upon the 14th of April last at No. 17, Badderly Gardens. Put down in black and white, my surmise might seem too crude, too grotesque, for serious consideration. And yet that something did occur, and that it was of a nature which will leave its mark upon every one of us for the rest of our lives, is as certain as the unanimous testimony of five witnesses can make it. I will not enter into any argument or speculation. I will only give a plain statement, which will be submitted to John Moir, Harvey Deacon, and Mrs. Delamere, and withheld from publication unless they are prepared to corroborate every detail. I cannot obtain the sanction of Paul Le Duc, for he appears to have left the country.

It was John Moir (the well-known senior partner of Moir, Moir, and Sanderson) who had originally turned our attention to occult subjects. He had, like many very hard and practical men of business, a mystic side to his nature, which had led him to the examination, and eventually to the acceptance, of those elusive phenomena which are grouped together with much that is foolish, and much that is fraudulent, under the common heading of spiritualism. His researches, which had begun with an open mind, ended unhappily in dogma, and he became as positive and fanatical as any other bigot. He represented in our little group the body of men who have turned these singular phenomena into a new religion.

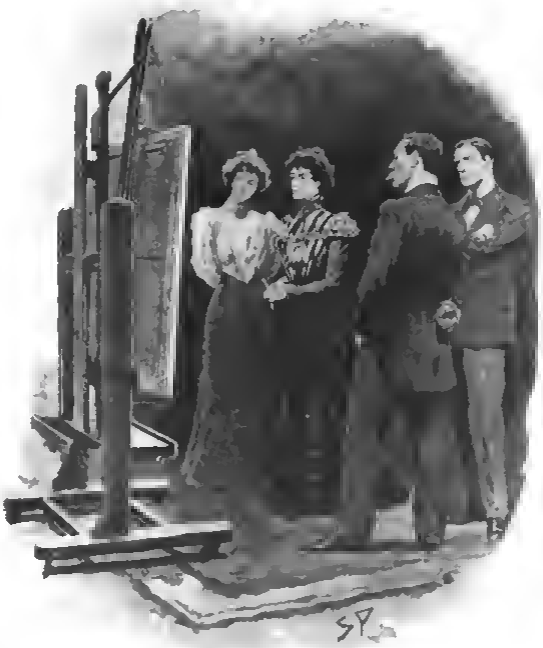
Mrs. Delamere, our medium, was his sister, the wife of Delamere, the rising sculptor. Our experience had shown us that to work on these subjects without a medium was as futile as for an astronomer to make observations without a telescope. On the other hand, the introduction of a paid medium was hateful to all of us. Was it not obvious that he or she would feel bound to return some result for money received, and that the temptation to fraud would be an overpowering one? No phenomena could be relied upon which were produced at a guinea an hour. But, fortunately, Moir had discovered that his sister was mediumistic—in other words, that she was a battery of that animal magnetic force which is the only form of energy which is subtle enough to be acted upon from the spiritual plane as well as from our own material one. Of course, when I say this, I do not mean to beg the question, but I am simply indicating the theories upon which we were ourselves, rightly or wrongly, explaining what we saw. The lady came, not altogether with the approval of her husband, and though she never gave indications of any very great psychic force, we were able, at least, to obtain those usual phenomena of message-filling which are at the same time so puerile and so inexplicable. Every Sunday evening we met in Harvey Deacon's studio at Badderly Gardens, the next house to the corner of Merton Park Road.

Harvey Deacon's imaginative work in art would prepare anyone to find that he was an ardent lover of everything which was *outré* and sensational. A certain picturesqueness in the study of the occult had been the quality which had originally attracted him to it, but his attention was speedily arrested by some of those phenomena to which I have referred, and he was coming rapidly to the conclusion that what he had looked upon as an amusing romance and an after-dinner entertainment was really a very formidable reality. He is a man with a remarkably clear and logical brain—a true descendant of his ancestor, the well-known Scotch professor—and he represented in our small circle the critical element, the man who has no prejudices, is prepared to follow facts as far as he can see them, and refuses to theorize in advance of his data. His caution annoyed Moir as much as the latter's robust faith amused Deacon, but each in his own way was equally keen upon the matter.

And I? What am I to say that I repre-

sented? I was not the devotee. I was not the scientific critic. Perhaps the best that I can claim for myself is that I was the dilettante man about town, anxious to be in the swim of every fresh movement, thankful for any new sensation which would take me out of myself and open up fresh possibilities of existence. I am not an enthusiast myself, but I like the company of those who are. Moir's talk, which made me feel as if we had a private pass key through the door of death, filled me with a vague contentment. The soothing atmosphere of the séance with the darkened lights was delightful to me. In a word, the thing amused me, and so I was there.

It was, as I have said, upon the 14th of April last that the very singular event which I am about to put upon record took place. I was the first of the men to arrive at the studio, but Mrs. Delamere was already there, having had afternoon tea with Mrs. Harvey Deacon. The two ladies and Deacon himself were standing in front of an unfinished picture of his upon the easel. I am not an expert in art, and I have never professed to understand what Harvey Deacon meant by his pictures, but I could see in this instance that it was all very clever and imaginative, fairies and animals and allegorical figures of all sorts. The ladies were loud in their praises, and indeed the colour effect was a remarkable one.



THE LADIES WERE LOUD IN THEIR PRAISES.

"What do you think of it, Markham?" he asked.

"Well, it's above me," said I "These beasts—what are they?"

"Mythical monsters, imaginary creatures, heraldic emblems—a sort of weird, bizarre procession of them"

"With a white horse in front!"

"It's not a horse," said he, rather testily—which was surprising, for he was a very good-humoured fellow as a rule, and hardly ever took himself seriously.

"What is it, then?"

"Can't you see the horn in front? It's a unicorn I told you they were heraldic beasts. Can't you recognise one?"

"Very sorry, Deacon," said I, for he really seemed to be annoyed.

He laughed at his own irritation

"Excuse me, Markham!" said he, "the fact is that I have had an awful job over the beast All day I have been painting him in and painting him out, and trying to imagine what a real live, ramping unicorn would look like. At last I got him, as I hoped, so when you failed to recognise it, it took me on the raw."

"Why, of course it's a unicorn," said I, for he was evidently depressed at my obtuseness. "I can see the horn quite plainly, but I never saw a unicorn except beside the Royal Arms, and so I never thought of the creature. And these others are griffins and cockatrices, and dragons of sorts?"

"Yes, I had no difficulty with them. It was the unicorn which bothered me. However, there's an end of it until to-morrow" He turned the picture round upon the easel, and we all chatted about other subjects.

Moir was late that evening, and when he did arrive he brought with him, rather to our surprise, a small, stout Frenchman, whom he introduced as Monsieur Paul Le Duc. I say to our surprise, for we held a theory that any intrusion into our spiritual circle deranged the conditions, and introduced an element of suspicion. We knew that we could trust each other, but all our results were vitiated by the presence of an outsider. However, Moir soon reconciled us to the innovation. Monsieur Paul Le Duc was a famous student of occultism, a seer, a medium, and a mystic. He was travelling in England with a letter of introduction to Moir from the President of the Parisian brothers of the Rosy Cross. What more natural than that he should bring him to our little séance, or that we should feel honoured by his presence?

MONSIEUR PAUL LE DUC.

He was, as I have said, a small, stout man, undistinguished in appearance, with a broad, smooth, clean-shaven face, remarkable only for a pair of large, brown, velvety eyes, staring vaguely out in front of him. He was well dressed, with the manners of a gentleman, and his curious little turns of English speech set the ladies smiling Mrs. Deacon had a prejudice against our researches and left the room, upon which we lowered the lights, as was our custom, and drew up our chairs to the square mahogany table which stood in the centre of the studio. The light was subdued, but sufficient to allow us to see each other quite plainly I remember that I could even observe the curious, podgy little squstre-topped hands which the Frenchman laid upon the table

"What a fun!" said he "It is many years since I have sat in this fashion, and it is to me amusing Madame is medium Does madame make the trance?"

"Well, hardly that," said Mrs. Delamere "But I am always conscious of extreme sleepiness."

"It is the first stage. Then you encourage it, and there comes the trance. When the trance comes, then out jumps your little spirit and in jumps another little spirit, and so you have direct talking or writing. You leave your machine to be worked by another. *Hein?* But what have unicorns to do with it?"

Harvey Deacon started in his chair. The Frenchman was moving his head slowly round and staring into the shadows which draped the walls.

"What a fun!" said he. "Always unicorns. Who has been thinking so hard upon a subject so bizarre?"

"This is wonderful!" cried Deacon. "I have been trying to paint one all day. But how could you know it?"

"You have been thinking of them in this room."

"Certainly."

"But thoughts are things, my friend. When you imagine a thing you make a thing. You did not know it, *hein?* But I can see your unicorns because it is not only with my eye that I can see."

"Do you mean to say that I create a thing which has never existed by merely thinking of it?"

"But certainly. It is the fact which lies under all other facts. That is why an evil thought is also a danger."

"They are, I suppose, upon the astral plane?" said Moir.

"Ah, well, these are but words, my friends. They are there—somewhere—everywhere—I cannot tell myself. I see them. I could not touch them."

"You could not make *us* see them."

"It is to materialize them. Hold! It is an experiment. But the power is wanting. Let us see what power we have, and then arrange what we shall do. May I place you as I should wish?"

"You evidently know a great deal more about it than we do," said Harvey Deacon; "I wish that you would take complete control."

"It may be that the conditions are not good. But we will try what we can do. Madame will sit where she is, I next, and this gentleman beside me. Meester Moir will sit next to madame, because it is well to have blacks and blondes in turn. So! And now with your permission I will turn the lights all out."

"What is the advantage of the dark?" I asked.

"Because the force with which we deal is a vibration of ether and so also is light. We have the wires all for ourselves now—*hein?* You will not be frightened in the darkness, madame? What a fun is such a séance!"

At first the darkness appeared to be absolutely pitchy, but in a few minutes our eyes became so far accustomed to it that we could just make out each other's presence—very dimly and vaguely, it is true. I could see nothing else in the room—only the black loom of the motionless figures. We were all taking the matter much more seriously than we had ever done before.

"You will place your hands in front. It is hopeless that we touch, since we are so few round so large a table. You will compose yourself, madame, and if sleep should come to you you will not fight against it. And now we sit in silence and we expect——*hein?*"

So we sat in silence and expected, staring out into the blackness in front of us. A clock ticked in the passage. A dog barked intermittently far way. Once or twice a cab rattled past in the street, and the gleam of its lamps through the chink in the curtains was a cheerful break in that gloomy vigil. I felt those physical symptoms with which previous séances had made me familiar—the coldness of the feet, the tingling in the hands, the glow of the palms, the feeling of a cold wind upon the back. Strange little shooting pains came in my forearms, especially as it seemed to me in my left one, which was nearest to our visitor—due no doubt to disturbance of the vascular system, but worthy of some attention all the same. At the same time I was conscious of a strained feeling of expectancy which was almost painful. From the rigid, absolute silence of my companions I gathered that their nerves were as tense as my own.

And then suddenly a sound came out of the darkness—a low, sibilant sound, the quick, thin breathing of a woman. Quicker and thinner yet it came, as between clenched teeth to end in a loud gasp with a dull rustle of cloth.

"What's that? Is all right?" someone asked in the darkness.

"Yes, all is right," said the Frenchman. "It is madame. She is in her trance. Now, gentlemen, if you will wait quiet you will see something I think which will interest you much."

Still the ticking in the hall. Still the breathing, deeper and fuller now, from the medium. Still the occasional flash, more welcome than ever, of the passing lights of

the hansoms. What a gap we were bridging, the half raised veil of the eternal on one side and the cabs of London on the other. The table was throbbing with a mighty pulse. It swayed steadily, rhythmically, with an easy swooping, scooping motion under our fingers. Sharp little raps and cracks came from its substance, file firing, volley firing, the sounds of a fagot burning briskly on a frosty night.

"There is much power," said the Frenchman. "See it on the table!"

"Shall we call the alphabet?" asked Moir.

"But no—for we can do much better," said our visitor. "It is but a clumsy thing to tilt the table for every letter of the alphabet, and with such a medium as madame we should do better than that."

"Yes, you will do better," said a voice.

"Who was that? Who spoke? Was that you, Markham?"

"No, I did not speak."

"It was madame who spoke."

"THERE IS MUCH POWER," SAID THE FRENCHMAN.

I had thought that it was some delusion of my own, but all could see it now. There was a greenish yellow phosphorescent light—or I should say a luminous vapour rather than a light—which lay over the surface of the table. It rolled and wreathed and undulated in dim glimmering folds, turning and swirling like clouds of smoke. I could see the white, square-ended hands of the French medium in this baleful light.

"What a fun!" he cried. "It is splendid!"

"But it was not her voice."

"Is that you, Mrs. Delamere?"

"It is not the medium, but it is the power which uses the organs of the medium," said the strange, deep voice.

"Where is Mrs. Delamere? It will not hurt her, I trust."

"The medium is happy in another plane of existence. She has taken my place, as I have taken hers."

"Who are you?"

"It cannot matter to you who I am. I am one who has lived as you are living, and who has died as you will die."

We heard the creak and grate of a cab pulling up next door. There was an argument about the fare, and the cabman grumbled hoarsely down the street. The green-yellow cloud still swirled faintly over the table, dull elsewhere, but glowing into a dim luminosity in the direction of the medium. It seemed to be piling itself up in front of her. A sense of fear and cold struck into my heart. It seemed to me that lightly and flippantly we had approached the most real and august of sacraments, that communion with the dead of which the fathers of the Church had spoken.

"Don't you think we are going too far? Should we not break up the seance?" I cried.

But the others were all earnest to see the end of it. They laughed at my scruples.

"All powers are made for use," said Harvey Deacon. "If we *can* do this, we *should* do this. Every new departure of knowledge has been called unlawful in its inception. It is right and proper that we should inquire into the nature of death."

"It is right and proper,' said the voice.

"There, what more could you ask?" cried Moir, who was much excited. "Let us have a test. Will you give us a test that you are really there?"

"What test do you demand?"

"Well, now—I have some coins in my pocket. Will you tell me how many?"

"We come back in the hope of teaching and of elevating, and not to guess childish riddles."

"Ha, ha, Meester Moir, you catch it that time," cried the Frenchman. "But surely that is very good sense what the Control is saying."

"It is a religion, not a game," said the cold, hard voice.

"Exactly—the very view I take of it," cried Moir. "I am sure I am very sorry if I have asked a foolish question. You will not tell me who you are?"

"What does it matter?"

"Have you been a spirit long?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"We cannot reckon time as you do. Our conditions are different."

"Are you happy?"

"Yes."

"You would not wish to come back to life?"

"No—certainly not."

"Are you busy?"

"We could not be happy if we were not busy."

"What do you do?"

"I have said that the conditions are entirely different."

"Can you give us no idea of your work?"

"We labour for our own improvement and for the advancement of others."

"Do you like coming here to-night?"

"I am glad to come, if I can do any good by coming."

"Then to do good is your object?"

"It is the object of all life on every plane."

"You see, Markham, that should answer your scruples."

It did, for my doubts had passed and only interest remained.

"Have you pain in your life?" I asked.

"No, pain is a thing of the body."

"Have you mental pain?"

"Yes, one may always be sad or anxious."

"Do you meet the friends whom you have known on earth?"

"Some of them."

"Why only some of them?"

"Only those who are sympathetic."

"Do husbands meet wives?"

"Those who have truly loved."

"And the others?"

"They are nothing to each other."

"There must be a spiritual connection?"

"Of course."

"Is what we are doing right?"

"If done in the right spirit."

"What is the wrong spirit?"

"Curiosity and levity."

"May harm come of that?"

"Very serious harm."

"What sort of harm?"

"You may call up forces over which you have no control."

"Evil forces?"

"Undeveloped forces."

"You say they are dangerous. Dangerous to body or mind?"

"Sometimes to both."

There was a pause, and the blackness seemed to grow blacker still, while the yellow-green fog swirled and smoked upon the table.

"Any questions you would like to ask, Moir?" said Harvey Deacon.

"Only this—do you pray in your world?"

"One should pray in every world."

"Why?"

"Because it is the acknowledgment of forces outside ourselves."

"What religion do you hold over there?"

"We differ exactly as you do."

"You have no certain knowledge?"

"We have only faith."

"These questions of religion," said the Frenchman, "they are of interest to you serious English people, but they are not so much fun. It seems to me that with this power here we might be able to have some great experience—*hein?* Something of which we could talk."

"But nothing could be more interesting than this," said Moir.

"Well, if you think so, that is very well," the Frenchman answered, peevishly. "For my part, it seems to me that I have heard all this before, and that to-night I should weesh to try some experiment with all this force which is given to us. But if you have other questions, then ask them, and when you are finish we can try something more."

But the spell was broken. We asked and asked, but the medium sat silent in her chair. Only her deep, regular breathing showed that she was there. The mist still swirled upon the table.

"You have disturbed the harmony. She will not answer."

"But we have learned already all that she can tell—*hein?* For my part I wish to see something that I have never seen before."

"What then?"

"You will let me try?"

"What would you do?"

"I have said to you that thoughts are things. Now I wish to *prove* it to you, and to show you that which is only a thought. Yes, yes, I can do it and you will see. Now I ask you only to sit still and say nothing, and keep ever your hands quiet upon the table."

The room was blacker and more silent than ever. The same feeling of apprehension which had lain heavily upon me at the beginning of the séance was back at my heart once more. The roots of my hair were tingling.

"It is working! It is working!" cried the Frenchman, and there was a crack in his voice as he spoke which told me that he also was strung to his tightest.

The luminous fog drifted slowly off the table, and wavered and flickered across the room. There in the farther and darkest corner it gathered and glowed, hardening down into a shining core—a strange, shifty, luminous, and yet non-illuminating patch of radiance, bright itself and yet throwing no rays into the darkness. It had changed from a greenish-yellow to a dusky sullen red. Then round this centre there coiled a dark, smoky substance, thickening, hardening, growing denser and blacker. And then the light went out, smothered in that which had grown round it.

"It has gone."

"Hush—there's something in the room."

We heard it in the corner where the light

"THERE WERE TWO STRANGE EYES GLOWING AT US."

had been, something which breathed deeply and fidgeted in the darkness.

"What is it? Le Duc, what have you done?"

"It is all right. No harm will come." The Frenchman's voice was treble with agitation.

"Good heavens, Moir, there's a large animal in the room. Here it is, close by my chair! Go away! Go away!"

It was Harvey Deacon's voice, and then came the sound of a blow upon some hard object. And then . . . . And then . . . how can I tell you what happened then?

Some huge thing hurtled against us in the darkness, rearing, stamping, smashing, springing, snorting. The table was splintered. We were scattered in every direction. It clattered and scrambled amongst us, rushing with horrible energy from one corner of the room to another. We were all screaming with fear, grovelling upon our hands and knees to get away from it. Something trod upon my left hand, and I felt the bones splinter under the weight.

"A light! A light!" someone yelled.

"Moir, you have matches, matches!"

"No, I have none. Deacon, where are the matches? For God's sake, the matches!"

"I can't find them. Here, you Frenchman, stop it!"

"It is beyond me. Oh, *mon Dieu*, I cannot stop it. The door! Where is the door?"

My hand, by good luck, fell upon the handle as I groped about in the darkness. The hard breathing, snorting, rushing creature tore past me and butted with a fearful crash against the oaken partition. The instant that it had passed I turned the handle, and next moment we were all outside and the door shut behind us. From within came a horrible crashing and rending and stamping.

"What is it? In Heaven's name, what is it?"

"A horse. I saw it when the door opened. But Mrs. Delaniere——?"

"We must fetch her out. Come on, Markham; the longer we wait the less we shall like it."

He flung open the door and we rushed in. She was there on the ground amidst the splinters of her chair. We seized her and dragged her swiftly out, and as we gained the door I looked over my shoulder into the darkness. There were two strange eyes glowing at us, a rattle of hoofs, and I had just time to slam the door when there came a crash upon it which split it from top to bottom.

"It's coming through! It's coming!"

"Run, run for your lives!" cried the Frenchman.

Another crash, and something shot through the riven door. It was a long white spike, gleaming in the lamplight. For a moment it shone before us, and then with a snap it disappeared again.

"Quick! Quick! This way!" Harvey Deacon shouted. "Carry her in! Here! Quick!"

We had taken refuge in the dining-room, and shut the heavy oak door. We laid the senseless woman upon the sofa, and as we did so, Moir, the hard man of business, drooped and fainted across the hearthrug. Harvey Deacon was as white as a corpse, jerking and twitching like an epileptic. With a crash we heard the studio door fly to pieces, and the snorting and stamping were in the passage, up and down, up and down, shaking the house with their fury. The Frenchman had sunk his face on his hands, and sobbed like a frightened child.

"What shall we do?" I shook him roughly by the shoulder. "Is a gun any use?"

"No, no. The power will pass. Then it will end."

"You might have killed us all — you unspeakable fool — with your infernal experiments."

"I did not know. How could I tell that it would be frightened? It is mad with terror. It was his fault. He struck it."

Harvey Deacon sprang up. "Good heavens!" he cried.

A terrible scream sounded through the house.

"It's my wife! Here, I am going out. If it's the Evil One himself I am going out!"

He had thrown open the door and rushed out into the passage. At the end of it, at the foot of the stairs, Mrs. Deacon was lying senseless, struck down by the sight which she had seen. But there was nothing else. With eyes of horror we looked about us, but all was perfectly quiet and still. I approached the black square of the studio door, expecting with every slow step that some atrocious shape would hurl itself out of it. But nothing came, and all was silent inside the room. Peering and peering, our hearts in our mouths, we came to the very threshold, and stared into the darkness. There was still no sound, but in one direction there was also no darkness. A luminous,

glowing cloud, with an incandescent centre, hovered in the corner of the room. Slowly it dimmed and faded, growing thinner and fainter, until at last the same dense, velvety blackness filled the whole studio. And with

began by saying that it would seem too grotesque to dogmatize as to what it was which actually did occur; but I give my impressions, *our* impressions (since they are corroborated by Harvey Deacon and John

"MRS. DEACON WAS LYING SENSELESS."

the last flickering gleam of that baleful light the Frenchman broke into a shout of joy.

"What a fun!" he cried. "No one is hurt, and only the door broken, and the ladies frightened. But, my friends, we have done what has never been done before."

"And as far as I can help it," said Harvey Deacon, "it will certainly never be done again."

And that was what befell upon the 14th of April last at No. 17, Badderly Gardens. I

Moir), for what they are worth. You may if it pleases you imagine that we were the victims of an elaborate and extraordinary hoax. Or you may think with us that we underwent a very real and a very terrible experience. Or perhaps you may know more than we do of such occult matters, and can inform us of some similar occurrence. In this latter case a letter to William Markham, 146M, The Albany, would help to throw a light upon that which is very dark to us.

THE STRAND MAGAZINE.

Vol. xx. DECEMBER, 1900. No. 120.

To Friends of "The Strand,"
Old and New,
Near and Far
—Greeting!

THIS is the end of the Tenth year of the publication of THE STRAND MAGAZINE, and it comes at the same time as the issue of the One Thousandth number of *Tit-Bits*.

I should like, therefore, personally to thank all those who have so consistently patronized these two publications, with which I am so closely identified.

The reception given to THE STRAND MAGAZINE was from the first most gratifying; and it has been said that a new era in magazines was created by its appearance.

As with *Tit-Bits*, so in the case of THE STRAND MAGAZINE, there have been many who have followed the lead thus given. Of this I do not complain, the world is wide.

We have been fortunate enough to secure a brilliant band of writers, many of whom will, I hope, continue to work for the Magazine in the years to come.

The following amongst many others have been contributors:—

THE LATE GRANT ALLEN.
F. ANSTEY.
LORD AVEBURY.
SIR ROBERT BALL.
ROBERT BARR.
LORD CHARLES BERESFORD.
SIR WALTER BESANT.
C. E. BORCHGREVINK.
MISS BRADDON.
FRANK T. BULLEN.
CARMEN SYLVA.
CONAN DOYLE.
MANVILLE FENN.
GEORGE GISSING.
BRET HARTE.
CUTCLIFFE HYNE.
W. W. JACOBS.
RUDYARD KIPLING.
H. W. LUCY.
MRS. L. T. MEADE.
SIR FRANCIS MONTEFIORE, BART.
ARTHUR MORRISON.
COUNTESS OF MUNSTER.
DR. NANSEN.
MAX O'RELL.
GILBERT PARKER, M.P.
JAMES PAYN.
MAX PEMBERTON.
CLARK RUSSELL.
THE LATE LORD RUSSELL OF KILLOWEN.
J. HOLT SCHOOLING.
CLEMENT SCOTT.
FRANK R. STOCKTON.
JULES VERNE.
H. G. WELLS.
STANLEY WEYMAN.
JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

It is a source of satisfaction to know that, whilst we have received such assistance from authors and artists, THE STRAND MAGAZINE has been able to create or enhance many reputations.

The following facts and figures relate to the production of twenty half-yearly volumes, or 120 monthly parts. Every copy contains, approximately, 62,000 words of matter, not counting the advertisement pages. Thus the 120 parts have, including the double numbers, over 8,000,000 words of original work. These have been furnished by over 600 different authors in some 1,800 contributions. They have been selected from matter sent in at the rate of some 4,000 manuscripts annually, which for the ten years brings us to a total of 40,000 manuscripts submitted for consideration.

In order to illustrate the 900 short stories which have appeared in the pages of THE STRAND, twenty of the leading black-and-white artists have been constantly employed during the ten years, while a considerably larger number have contributed occasionally. Many of these have actually found their first stepping-stone in the pages of THE STRAND, and are now recognised as being at the head of their profession. The illustrations, including photographs, number 17,000, out of which there are 7,000 original drawings, which leaves a total of 10,000 photographs which had never been published before.

It is an interesting fact that, while at first THE STRAND MAGAZINE had very little sale in America, it has now taken firm hold there and has a very widespread circulation.

At the end of our Tenth year I beg personally to thank those who have been associated with me in the conduct of the Magazine, also contributors who have given such good work, and the artists who have added such a charm to its pages; further, I wish to thank that large body of the public who have continuously favoured THE STRAND MAGAZINE with their valued support.

THE ENCHANTED FEATHERS.

AN ORIENTAL FAIRY TALE.

FROM THE FRENCH.

"A MAN who will cross the path of your son will be the cause of great misfortunes to you"

Such was the prediction of the oldest magician at the Court of the King of the Richanians, and it was in consequence of this prediction that the King issued a severe edict. Each time that his son and heir, Ali, left the palace it was the duty of a crier to inform the people. Then in an instant the streets became empty, the houses were closed, the doors of the town were carefully guarded. Deserted and silent, Richa was like a dead city

Several years passed in this manner without any catastrophe taking place, and the King was rejoiced in his heart because the wise measures he had adopted had defeated the sinister prediction

Now, one day the criers had announced that Prince Ali would proceed to the Baths at the eighth hour. Thus, the streets through which the Prince passed, surrounded by his escort, were entirely deserted As far as the eye could see no living thing appeared in the abandoned streets, and all the houses were closed as in a time of general mourning Notwithstanding, at a spot near the baths, stretched on the ground behind one of the pillars of the arcades, a mendicant slept. At the sound of the approaching horses' hoofs he suddenly awoke and, leaning upon his elbow, half rose, the better to see the passing cavalcade. But in an instant the soldiers of the Prince's guard rushed upon him, beating him with the butt-end of their muskets, and drove him howling from the spot

The next day a revolution took place. The King was assassinated by conspirators against his throne. Prince Ali escaped death by a miracle, and left his country to live in exile an existence full of sadness and wretchedness.

Ali, however, was a young man of more

than ordinary intelligence. He meditated profoundly over the misfortunes which had befallen him, and was not long in satisfying himself as to their cause.

"All our troubles," he reasoned, "commenced on the day after I met the mendicant, who was maltreated by my bodyguard. I am convinced that this mendicant was a magician in disguise, who is now avenging the outrage we inflicted upon him. I have no doubt this magician is the Lord Abd-el-Kader of Djilane—the most powerful of necromancers. I have often heard that he loves to mingle with the people, dressed in the poorest garb. Therefore I will go to seek the Lord Abd-el-Kader, I will kneel before him, and bow my head in the dust. Abd-el-Kader is generous as he is powerful, and I am sure he will forgive me."

On the same day Ali set out on his journey, walking the whole distance, as he was very poor; but he was obliged to walk a long and weary way. His only nourishment consisted of the dates he gathered on the road; to quench his thirst he drank at the nearest spring. Each day he sheltered himself for a little while beneath the shade of the palm trees. When refreshed by sleep he started again, plodding on thus almost without cessation, day and night. Exhausted with fatigue, his feet bruised, and his legs sinking under him, he was near the point of falling to the ground, when suddenly appeared before him the great magician of whom he was in search.

"ALI PUT FORTH HIS HAND AND SEIZED THE BEAUTIFUL BIRD."

Ali prostrated himself, and his forehead touched the dust. Then with a supplicating voice he said —

"Oh, mighty Abd-el-Kader, my father gravely offended you on my account. Your vengeance was just. You have caused my father to perish, and you have sent me into exile to live a life of misery and wretchedness. No doubt the Fates ordained it should be thus But see to what a state I am reduced I am come to crave your clemency, because I can no longer live under the weight of your anger. I have journeyed many days and nights. I am footsore, and my strength is exhausted Oh, master, your goodness is equal to your power. Will you not forgive the most unfortunate of princes?"

The good Abd-el-Kader was touched by his sincere repentance

"I forgive you, my son," said he. "Rise, and remember the words I am about to speak. I will make your fortune, and will restore to you everything that you have lost by the fault of your father. Promise only always to obey me, to undertake nothing without consulting me, and to follow without question my orders Now go to the neighbouring forest and set your springe A bird will come and be captured. Bring it to me."

Ali entered the forest, as he was told, set his springe, and concealed himself in the brushwood. Almost at the same instant he heard the whirring of wings, and a beautiful bird appeared. So dazzling was his plumage that the shade of the forest was brilliantly illuminated by it Ali put forth his hand and seized the beautiful bird The captive struggled, and at last escaped and flew away, leaving in the hands of his would be captor nothing but a bunch of his marvellous plumes.

And wonderful plumes they were! Soft to the touch, warm to the eye, coloured with exquisite and varied tints. On waving them

the Prince saw that the light produced upon them a thousand kaleidoscopic effects; just as when the jewel-merchant plunges his hand into his treasure-box is to be seen the sparkle of diamonds or the milky beauty of pearls, the flame of rubies, the soft green of emeralds, and the changing blues of turquoises or sapphires And all these tints of the wonderful feathers seemed to blend into a harmony caused by their diversity. Even the rainbow itself was rivalled by the delicate colours of these wonderful feathers.

Ali looked at them without appreciation of their beauty, for despair was in his heart "Alas!" he sighed, "I have failed to fulfil the first command of my master."

"Do not grieve, my son," said a voice, which Ali recognised as that of Abd-el-Kader. "Take these plumes, return to your native country, and offer them to the present King of the Richamans."

Ali immediately set out upon his journey, greatly comforted by the kind tone of the magician On his arrival at Richa he went to the palace and offered the plumes to the King, as he had been told. As soon as the King saw them he was thrown into ecstasy.

"How marvellous are these plumes!" he exclaimed. "To possess them I would have given all the treasures of my kingdom. He who brings them and offers them to me of his own free will is dearer to me than any of my subjects."

And from that day Ali was installed at the palace, and the King overwhelmed him with presents and dignities

But all these favours naturally excited the jealousy of the courtiers. Courts are always full of plots and counterplots. Of this Ali soon had an experience. The King had a Grand Vizier whose name was Slimane, who up to that time had been all-powerful. Slimane, foreseeing in the new favourite his future rival, conceived an enmity towards him, but he was artful enough not to show this sentiment outwardly, and reflected long on the best means of quietly suppressing Ali. At last, after maturing his plans, Slimane went to the King and said:—

"O King, the plumes given to your Majesty by Ali are unquestionably beautiful in the extreme But the bird to which they belong is far more beautiful. I am astonished that Ali has only brought you a few feathers, and has not esteemed you worthy to possess the bird itself He knows where it is to be found. If he loves you truly, he will bring it to your Majesty."

The King, thus prompted by the crafty Slimane, sent for Ali forthwith, and forbade him to appear again in his presence until he was ready to bring the marvellous bird.

Ali heard this edict with consternation. "What is the good," he sighed, "to have restored me to prosperity, since it was to be of such brief duration?"

"Do not afflict yourself, my son," replied a voice which Ali instantly recognised, "but return to the forest and again set your springe."

Ali obeyed, and arriving at the forest had no sooner made his preparations than the bird again came and was caught in the trap. This time the young Prince took good care not to allow it to escape, and, filled with joy, he brought it back to the King As soon as the monarch saw the fairy bird Ali was restored to his favour. He embraced him, and said —

"You are the most worthy of my subjects I owe you more than life, and I will cherish you always."

Ali rejoiced at this promise of the King, and was simple enough to believe him sincere.

Meanwhile, Slimane was filled with rage at the turn of events, nor was it long before he had invented a new perfidious plot against the unfortunate Ali. He went to the King and said, "Sire, thanks to my wise counsels you possess a rare and beautiful bird But how much more beautiful is the Princess Halyme, of whose solitude it was the only charm. The Princess Halyme is as lovely as the day, and I am surprised that your Majesty has not been thought worthy to contemplate her dazzling beauty. Ali knows where to find her. If he loves your Majesty, as he pretends, he will conduct this peerless Princess to the most powerful of Kings."

When the King informed Ali of what had taken place, and intimated his Royal pleasure that the Princess Halyme should be forthwith brought to his capital, Ali replied boldly, "Sire, it shall be done," for he had already consulted his patron, Abd el Kader.

"I can inform your Majesty," he added, "that the Princess Halyme is even more beautiful than Slimane has told your Majesty In fact, her loveliness surpasses all that man can imagine. I will depart at once, Sire, and I promise to conduct her hither But an enchanter holds her prisoner in an island far away in the great sea which surrounds the world In order that I may approach it I must be provided with a ship made of gold and pure silver, constructed from the treasures in the vaults of your Grand Vizier."

And thus was the crafty Slimane adroitly caught in his own trap. The Grand Vizier knew too well the character of the King to doubt that he would be compelled to accede to Ali's demands. He therefore thought it wiser not to risk the loss of his head by a refusal. Thus, making a virtue of necessity, he gave to his successful rival the key of his treasury.

In a few weeks the ship of fine gold and silver was built. Her keel and sides were of solid gold, partly covered by a sheet of silver. The masts, oars, and rudder were of gold and the sails of the finest silver cloth.

To construct such a marvellous vessel, as may be imagined, made a considerable inroad upon the gold and silver of the Grand Vizier. In short, it was a terrible blow to the avaricious Slimane, who had been many years amassing these treasures, which he now saw disappear by the car-load, to be thrown into the crucible. He shed tears of rage over his loss, but only when no one could see him — above all, the King; for his first duty was to show always to his master a smiling visage.

The magnificent golden ship weighed anchor; upon the vast sea which surrounds the world she sailed away towards the enchanted island, where a powerful spell held prisoner the adorable Princess Halyme, weeping over the loss of her marvellous bird. At the wheel stood the magician Abd el Kader, whilst Ali, leaning over the taffrail, scanned the horizon. These two alone constituted the entire crew and passengers of the golden ship armoured with silver. During an entire moon they sailed upon the ocean, when at last they perceived from afar a rock rising from the sea. It was the mysterious prison where the Princess, beautiful as the dawn, was held in bondage. At the end of the bay rose the palace; upon the terrace dreamed the Princess Halyme, robed in snowy veils of white.

As soon as she saw the ship of gold anchored in the bay she was seized with curiosity to examine closely this new wonder. She even desired to handle the oars, touch the sails, and contemplate her fair visage mirrored in the golden masts. Thus she accepted the hand which Ali held out to her, and sprang lightly upon the deck. Instantly

SHE SPRANG LIGHTLY UPON THE DECK.

the ship was in motion, sprang like a living thing through the waves, and in less time than it takes to write it the shores of the island were already so far that the eye could scarcely distinguish the bare outlines.

But Halyme had not called for help, Halyme had not wept with fear. She contented herself with clasping more strongly the hand of Ali. And thus was the beautiful Princess rescued from her prison.

One may easily imagine the feelings of the King when this enchanted pearl was presented to him. A gem whose pure lustre, unseen by all, had only shone upon a desert island in the midst of the vast ocean which surrounds the world. Ali was magnificently rewarded. Amongst other splendid presents he received the gift of the ship with which he had carried off the Princess—the ship of gold covered with silver armour.

Few pitied the avaricious Slimane, who was deprived of all his wealth and found himself reduced to miserable penury, whilst his rival, enriched by the spoils bestowed upon him by the King, flourished in opulence.

Of course, the King immediately fell violently in love with the Princess Halyme. "The time is now come," said he, "when you must choose between Ali and me. If you will consent to be my wife I will give you half of all my wealth, and you shall be Queen of the Richanians."

"Sire," replied the Princess Halyme, "I give your Majesty thanks. But before I accept your offer you must cause a funeral pile to be erected, surrounded on all sides by a deep ditch. Then your Majesty and Ali must each mount his horse, and to him who succeeds in overcoming this obstacle my hand will be given."

The King accepted the test, so overwhelming was his love for the Princess. Still, he was by no means easy in his mind concerning the result.

"Fear nothing, Sire," whispered the crafty Slimane to the King. "It is Ali who must make the first attempt to ride across the ditch and the funeral pile. Leave it to me, your Majesty; I will cause to be built a pyre so enormous, and there shall be dug a ditch so wide, that Ali will certainly be killed in the attempt to ride over them."

This cunning idea of the artful Slimane pleased the King enormously.

It was a memorable day, and one which became a record in the history of the Richanians. The people, hastening to Richa from every part of the kingdom, were ranged in a circle in the vast plain. They gathered, too, upon the mountains and the hills which surrounded the city. It was like a gigantic circus, into which thronged a bustling, noisy crowd, waiting with anxiety for a spectacle without parallel. In the centre was raised a colossal pyre, which certainly measured several hundred feet in every direction. Around this was a yawning ditch, 100ft. wide and deep as an abyss. Already the fire which had been communicated to the base of the enormous funeral pile caused a column of flame and smoke to rise into the clouds. The fateful moment came when the signal was about to be given.

Slimane, in imagination, already tasted the sweets of vengeance.

The King laughed silently in his braided beard.

As for poor Ali, he was disconsolate. "This is the time," he sighed, "when I stand most in need of the help of Abd-el-Kader. But what could even he do against such an extreme danger as this? I fear, alas, it is the end of all my hopes! I must resign myself to perish—to die is nothing in itself; to me the most terrible trial is the loss of my beautiful Princess."

"Do not distress yourself," said a voice which Ali recognised with joy. "Turn your gaze towards the East, and profit by the assistance which your friend sends you."

Ali turned as directed by Abd-el-Kader, and saw a horse ready caparisoned; but what a horse! Could the name of that noble animal be given to the miserable looking beast which met Ali's astonished eyes, and whose ribs seemed about to break through its transparent skin? And what trappings for such an occasion! Its bridle consisted of ropes of straw, the reins were pieces of string, and the saddle was roughly made of boards loosely tacked together and badly nailed, whilst from the pommel hung a pair of long spurs, also of wood. Notwithstanding the unpromising aspect of this singular steed Ali unhesitatingly mounted upon his back, seized the reins of string, put on the wooden spurs, and in this ridiculous guise rejoined the Royal retinue. As soon as he appeared thus mounted a roar of laughter burst from the crowd. This was followed by groans and hisses, a thousand times repeated by the surrounding echoes. The few who were disposed in his favour thought Ali had suddenly been bereft of his senses. If he intended, thought they, to face the danger nobly, why had he not selected a thoroughbred charger from the stables of the King, instead of straddling such a sorry steed as this?

Ali heard nothing of these murmurs. He rode boldly towards the funeral pile, which seemed like a mosque on fire. On his way he passed before the Princess Halyme, and as he saluted her he gave her a look full of love. Then, leaning forward upon his grotesque saddle of wood, he plunged his spurs into the side of his Rosinante, which instantly bounded into the air, disappeared for a second in the flames, and was seen to alight on the other side of the ditch, galloping forward with strength and grace.

"HE GAVE HER A LOOK FULL OF LOVE."

Then on all sides was heard a shout of enthusiasm. Ali presently returned to the place where the Princess Halyme viewed this tournament of a new description, and the looks the lovers exchanged were significant of the sentiment which filled their hearts.

At sight of this the King was very much enraged, and he gave way to a fit of passion. "You fools!" he exclaimed, "you think that a great exploit, no doubt! Do you not suppose that your King is able to perform so trifling a feat? I will show you that it is merely child's play. I have in my stables horses of the purest blood; many of them can outstrip the wind in speed, and others in leaping over obstacles have so much lightness and suppleness that it might be imagined they had wings. Let them be brought hither! I ordain that all the great lords of the Court and all the officers of the army shall mount and follow me!"

It was soon seen that the King was in a high state of exaltation, and, indeed, labouring under an attack of insanity, but none dared disobey him. A groom led forward the most high spirited steed from the Royal stables, a Syrian horse, richly caparisoned as on days of great ceremony. The King leaped into the saddle. To be impartial, it must be admitted that he was a brilliant horseman. With great ease he restrained the noble animal trembling with ardour and pawing the ground with impatience. Then he clapped spurs to his sides and rode to the place where the Princess Halyme was seated, where he curbed with a hand of steel his impetuous steed. Then suddenly he again spurred his horse to the quick, who bounded forward like an arrow.

The throng of courtiers followed their King, the frightened horses rushed after their

leader in a fantastic gallop, and the entire cavalcade appeared seized with frenzy. At this terrible moment they presented a weird spectacle, when, still preceded by the maddened King, horses and men rushed into the fiery gulf. For an instant, a mere second of time, the rich embroideries of their costumes, the jewels which ornamented their turbans,

Minutes and hours passed which seemed to the beholders like centuries, the fire of the funeral pile slackened, then ceased altogether; but nothing was seen of the King and his brilliant Court—they had all perished in the flames.

When the crowd saw that all was over, from the surrounding hills arose a cry from thousands of throats—

"Long live our King Ali!"

"KING, HORSES, AND MEN RUSHED INTO THE FIERY GULF"

and the gems which decorated the trappings of their horses flashed in the light of the fire from the funeral pile, then all were engulfed in the gigantic brazier, millions of sparks flew into the air and were wafted away by the wind, then a cloud of ashes was raised above the pyre and fell in a rain of cinders, and once again the flames sprang up more vigorously than before.

Thus acclaimed, Ali advanced towards the Princess Halyme, and knelt upon one knee before her; with a radiant smile, Halyme raised her lover from the ground and embraced him in the presence of the multitude.

And thus it was that Prince Ali wedded the Princess Halyme, and became King of the Richamians.

FROM THE FRENCH OF M. DE LA BARRE.

LONG ago there lived in Brittany a King whose kingdom was very small, and whose sole wealth consisted of a pear-tree which grew in his orchard. Each year this tree bore three splendid pears.

It was partly the King's own fault that he never could manage to pick these pears at the right moment. In July the fruit grew riper and riper until it became solid silver. In August it grew still larger, and changed to gold. Just at this changing time the pears should have been plucked, but they always mysteriously vanished the night before the day whereon their owner had intended plucking them. Naturally, the King preferred golden pears to silver ones, but this preference cost him dear, for through it he lost the pears altogether.

The King's children had a personal interest in the wonderful tree. His six daughters, each of whom looked for a dowry from the precious fruit, were each year bitterly disappointed, as also were their two brothers, Yann and Claudik.

Yann was greedy and selfish, but Claudik was good and brave. One day Yann proposed to his brother that they two should pluck the pears and divide the spoil. This Claudik refused to do. "The pears are not ours," said he, "they belong to our father."

Then Yann went to the King and begged of him to divide the fruit. "If I may have one pear for myself," said the greedy fellow, "I promise to keep watch over the tree, in order to protect its fruit from thieves."

The King, after some demur, yielded to the wish of his self-willed son. It was arranged that Yann should have the pear which grew on the north side of the tree; Claudik was to have the pear which faced the south, while that growing in the centre was to be divided amongst the six sisters.

July was drawing to an end, and the silver fruit was already faintly tinged with gold Yann, in fulfilment of his promise, mounted guard in the orchard Nothing happened for two nights. On the third night he foolishly drank an extra flagon of wine Of course he fell asleep at his post, and the next morning only two pears remained on the tree. The pear in the centre had gone, and the poor Princesses had again lost their dowries.

"Never mind," said selfish Yann, "mine is there still, so what matter? I will keep a better look out to-night" And for two nights he was watchful and alert, pacing up and down, sword in hand; but on the third night the weather was so hot that he could not resist the temptation to indulge in a double quantity of cider. He awoke in the morning to find that his own pear had vanished How he stamped and raved at everybody, until the generous Claudik offered to give him half of the remaining pear, which belonged to him

It was now Claudik's turn to mount guard He armed himself with a huge and marvellously keen scimitar and, when evening came, took his post beside the pear-tree. He had with him his flute, an instrument which he played with skill, and, as the night grew darker, he played to keep up his spirits

As the clock struck twelve an owl flew with a screech from the tree. Claudik looked up, and beheld among the branches a big, brawny arm, and an enormous hand clutching at the solitary pear

"Who goes there?" shouted the youth, raising his scimitar, and dealing a tremendous blow at the robber

A deafening yell was followed by a violent gust of wind, which shook the tree to its roots—then all was still. On the ground lay a huge hand covered with blood, but still holding the precious pear. The thief was evidently some greedy giant.

Claudik put the pear into his wallet He thought at first of flinging the hand into the sea, but changed his mind, and determined, if possible, to find its owner

The moon had risen, and across the fields and over the hills a trail of blood could be distinctly seen This trail Claudik, carrying with him the giant's hand, carefully followed until he reached the Forest of Kranou, where the traces grew indistinct and finally disappeared

"Oh," said the young man to himself, as he returned to his home, "I have heard that a horrible ogre dwells in that forest Well! If I were to take him his hand and offer to restore it to its proper place I should think he would at least have the grace to spare my life. Perhaps, too, I may regain the stolen pears."

Accordingly, the next day Claudik went to a wizard who knew how to restore lopped-off limbs by means of a wonderful herb-ointment called "Louzou." From him Claudik took a lesson or two, and then, armed with a box of the ointment—an invaluable remedy which had never been known to fail—he made his way to the nearest town.

In the market-place a herald was announcing that the great giant-King of the forest would give the hand of his daughter, the lovely Fleur-du-Kranou, to the man who should heal him of a grievous wound received in battle

"Not in battle," said Claudik, under his breath, "*in stealing pears.*"

The brave fellow went home again, put the hand into a big bag, which he strapped, knapsack-fashion, over his shoulder, then, taking with him his flute, set out in quest of the ogre He passed through the outskirts of the forest, and before long came to a deep moat, on the other side of which was a dark and dense wood He saw also some massive iron gates through which he would need to pass Beside them stood a little hut, and at its door sat a little old woman, spinning flax.

"Countess of the Portal!" called out Claudik, "will your grace be so good as to unbar the gates? I carry an important message to the King"

The old lady, flattered at being styled a countess, smiled as she said, "Is that really so, my bonny youth?"

"Yes," replied Claudik "Here in my knapsack I have something of great value which belongs to him"

"Listen to me," said the porteress, "and be warned in time All who enter here are doomed to die I would gladly save you from a cruel death"

"You cannot frighten me back, madam, I *must* reach the castle I bring to His Majesty a certain cure, and hope to be rewarded with the Princess's hand"

"Are you aware that many skilled surgeons and physicians have already come on the same errand? And of them all, *not one* has returned in safety to his home"

"Not one?" inquired Claudik, doubtfully

"Not one," replied the woman "During the King's illness his appetite has grown so voracious that he ruthlessly devours each of his would be sons-in-law He gives them no time in which to cure him, but quickly rends

"LISTEN TO ME," SAID THE PORTERESS "AND BE WARNED IN TIME. ALL WHO ENTER HERE ARE DOOMED TO DIE."

them in pieces and grills them on an immense gridiron. So insatiable is he, indeed, that by and by he will probably eat the Princess herself."

"That we shall see," said the undaunted Claudik. "Now, open the gates for me."

"Very well, my lad, you must have your way," was the reply. The doors swung open and Claudik passed through with his big bag upon his back. The old woman wished to know what was in the sack, and he told her that it contained several marvellous medicines, besides his flute, and a beautiful brocaded silk dress which he would give her when he returned from Court.

The aged porteress leaned towards him and whispered in his ear.

"Listen!" said she. "When you reach that defile in front of you you will see a pretty vista of trees, and on one side a narrow, rugged footpath. This path you must take. It will bring you to the back of the manor grounds. Once there, play upon your flute the *jabadao* as they dance it at Guingamp. The Princess, who dotes upon dancing, will come down when she hears your music. Then you must ask her to dance the gavotte with you, after that, you will doubtless know how to act for the best!"

Claudik thanked the old woman and went on his way. When he reached the defile he saw the vista of trees, and was about to turn into the narrow footpath beside it, when he became aware of certain strange shapes and shadows hanging from the boughs and swinging in the wind. Corpses, hanging heads downwards from the trees! Some were mere skeletons, with hideously rattling bones. Claudik shuddered. What if he should be the next to dangle there?

For a moment only he faltered, then he pulled himself together and went bravely forward. Presently the grey towers of the giant's castle came into sight. Claudik approached the wall of the tower and, standing below the casement, began to play the *jabadao* as danced at Guingamp. Very soon the casement was unbarred, and the young man, looking up, saw a Princess, fair as dawn, who made signs to him that she was coming down. She came, and, giving him her hand, led him across the turf. They danced the gavotte together in the starlight. Of this occupation, charming though it was, Claudik wearied sooner than the Princess did, for he was tired with his journey and with the weight of his burden. He was compelled to stop. When he had recovered his breath he asked the Princess to conduct him to the King. "Let us finish our dance first," said the lady. "When once my father has seen you there will be no more dancing for us!"

"But," said Claudik, "you do not know what I have in this sack. It is something which will instantly cure the King's hurt, and

then—with your consent, my Princess—I will claim you as my bride."

"Alas! so many have spoken thus," stammered the blushing girl, "they all came to do what you intend to do, and yet——"

"And yet you are here waiting for *me*," went on Claudik, proudly. "Have no fear, only take me to your father."

The Princess then told him to take off his magical contents of Claudik's sack rendered the flames harmless. At this Fleur du Kranou rejoiced; it really seemed as if she had found a deliverer at last! Suddenly the giant awoke, and said in a tremendous voice: "Oh, dear, I am *so* hungry! Get me food!" Then he espied Claudik, and roared out, "Ho, there! serve up that young fellow at once. Cook him on the gridiron, and give me some potatoes with him!"

"HE BECAME AWARE OF CERTAIN STRANGE SHAPES AND SHADOWS HANGING FROM THE BOUGHS.

shoes and to follow her swiftly and silently. He obeyed, and as they passed through the splendid halls, each guarded at its entrance by fierce beasts and brilliantly illuminated with torches of crystal and gold, Claudik observed, hanging in rows around the panelling, scores of glittering pears, which he easily recognised as his father's missing property.

At length they entered a hall larger but more dimly lighted than the rest. Here the giant lay sick. The Princess signed to Claudik that he should uncover his head. At their entrance two dragons guarding the door shot forth fire from their jaws, but the

Two stout cooks sprang forward, swinging their huge knives, but the blades no sooner touched Claudik's sack than they were shivered into atoms. Then Claudik put his flute to his mouth and played a merry jig, which set everybody a-dancing.

Fleur du Kranou took Claudik as a partner; the cooks whirled and twirled with the gridirons and saucepans; the dragons footed it with the lions, while the dogs and wolves skipped about anyhow. Even the old, hungry, raging giant jumped up and hopped around with the rest.

He still shrieked, "Put him on the gridiron!" but no one paid any attention to him,

and the dance waxed more and more furious. Perhaps it might be going on now had not the weight of Claudik's knapsack obliged him to stop. Then the King sank back upon his couch, and, when Claudik knelt beside him, instantly stretched out his hand to strangle the young stranger. But cunning Claudik had pushed forward the sack, and when the giant touched this his arm fell as though paralyzed, and he murmured in an agonized tone, "Oh, if I had but my other hand!"

THE OLD, HUNGRY, RAGING GIANT JUMPED UP AND HOPPED AROUND WITH THE PEST.

"Your other hand," said Claudik, undoing his sack and displaying its contents, "*here it is!* Now, if you will allow me, I will restore it to its rightful place."

Claudik's surgical operation proved a brilliant success. The giant King, highly delighted, not only considerately refrained from eating his doctor, but also rewarded him with the fee which he desired—that is to say, the Princess. The wedding was a very grand affair.

After the death of Claudik's father the pear tree was transplanted to Kranou, and there for many years it continued to yield its wonderful golden fruit.

The New Accelerator.

By H. G. Wells.

CERTAINLY, if ever a man found a guinea when he was looking for a pin it is my good friend Professor Gibberne. I have heard before of investigators overshooting the mark, but never quite to the extent that he has done. He has really, this time at any rate, without any touch of exaggeration in the phrase, found something to revolutionize human life. And that, when he was simply seeking an all-round nervous stimulant to bring languid people up to the stresses of these pushful days. I have tasted the stuff now several times, and I cannot do better than describe the effect the thing had on me. That there are astonishing experiences in store for all in search of new sensations will become apparent enough.

Professor Gibberne, as many people know, is my neighbour in Folkestone. Unless my memory plays me a trick, his portrait at various ages has already appeared in The Strand Magazine—I think late in 1899, but I am unable to look it up because I have lent that volume to someone who has never sent it back. The reader may, perhaps, recall the high forehead and the singularly long black eyebrows that give such a Mephistophelian touch to his face. He occupies one of those pleasant little detached houses in the mixed style that make the western end of the Upper Sandgate Road so interesting. His is the one with the Flemish gables and the Moorish portico, and it is in the little room with the mullioned bay window that he works when he is down here, and in which of an evening we have so often smoked and talked together. He is a mighty jester, but, besides, he likes to talk to me about his work, he is one of those men who find a help and stimulus in talking, and so I have been able to follow the conception of the New Accelerator right up from a very early stage. Of course, the greater portion of his experimental work is not done in Folkestone, but in Gower Street, in the fine new laboratory next to the hospital that he has been the first to use.

As everyone knows, or at least as all intelligent people know, the special department in which Gibberne has gained so great and deserved a reputation among physiologists is the action of drugs upon the nervous system. Upon soporifics, sedatives, and anæsthetics he is, I am told, unequalled. He is also a chemist of considerable eminence, and I suppose in the subtle and complex jungle of riddles that centres about the ganglion cell and the axis fibre there are little cleared places of his making, little glades of illumination, that, until he sees fit to publish his results, are still inaccessible to every other living man. And in the last few years he has been particularly assiduous upon this question of nervous stimulants, and already, before the discovery of the New Accelerator, very successful with them. Medical science has to thank him for at least three distinct and absolutely safe invigorators of unrivalled value to practising men. In cases of exhaustion the preparation known as Gibberne's B Syrup has, I suppose, saved more lives already than any lifeboat round the coast.

"But none of these little things begin to satisfy me yet," he told me nearly a year ago. "Either they increase the central energy without affecting the nerves or they simply increase the available energy by lowering the nervous conductivity; and all of them are unequal and local in their operation. One wakes up the heart and viscera and leaves the brain stupefied, one gets at the brain champagne fashion and does nothing good for the solar plexus, and what I want—and what, if it's an earthly possibility, I mean to have—is a stimulant that stimulates all round, that wakes you up for a time from the crown of your head to the tip of your great toe, and makes you go two—or even three to everybody else's one. Eh? That's the thing I'm after."

"It would tire a man," I said.

"Not a doubt of it. And you'd eat double or treble—and all that. But just think what the thing would mean. Imagine yourself with a little phial like this"—he held up a little bottle of green glass and marked his points with it—"and in this precious phial is the power to think twice as fast, move twice as quickly, do twice as much work in a given time as you could otherwise do."

"But is such a thing possible?"

"I believe so. If it isn't, I've wasted my time for a year. These various preparations of the hypophosphites, for example, seem to show that something of the sort . . . Even if it was only one and a half times as fast it would do."

"It *would* do," I said.

"If you were a statesman in a corner, for example, time rushing up against you, something urgent to be done, eh?"

"He could dose his private secretary," I said.

"And gain—double time. And think if *you*, for example, wanted to finish a book."

"Usually," I said, "I wish I'd never begun 'em."

"Or a doctor, driven to death, wants to sit down and think out a case. Or a barrister—or a man cramming for an examination."

"Worth a guinea a drop," said I, "and more—to men like that."

"And in a duel, again," said Gibberne, "where it all depends on your quickness in pulling the trigger."

"Or in fencing," I echoed.

"You see," said Gibberne, "if I get it as an all-round thing it will really do you no harm at all—except perhaps to an infinitesimal degree it brings you nearer old age. You will just have lived twice to other people's once——"

"I suppose," I meditated, "in a duel—it would be fair?"

"That's a question for the seconds," said Gibberne.

I harked back farther. "And you really think such a thing *is* possible?" I said.

"As possible," said Gibberne, and glanced at something that went throbbing by the window, "as a motor bus. As a matter of fact——"

He paused and smiled at me deeply, and tapped slowly on the edge of his desk with the green phial. "I think I know the stuff . . . . Already I've got something coming." The nervous smile upon his face betrayed the gravity of his revelation. He rarely talked of his actual experimental work unless things were very near the end. "And it may be, it may be—I shouldn't be surprised—it may even do the thing at a greater rate than twice."

"It will be rather a big thing," I hazarded.

"It will be, I think, rather a big thing."

But I don't think he quite knew what a big thing it was to be, for all that.

I remember we had several talks about the stuff after that. "The New Accelerator" he called it, and his tone about it grew more confident on each occasion. Sometimes he talked nervously of unexpected physiological results its use might have, and then he would get a little unhappy; at others he was frankly mercenary, and we debated long and anxiously how the preparation might be turned to commercial account. "It's a good thing," said Gibberne, "a tremendous thing. I know I'm giving the world something, and I think it only reasonable we should expect the world to pay. The dignity of science is all very well, but I think somehow I must have the monopoly of the stuff for, say, ten years. I don't see why *all* the fun in life should go to the dealers in ham."

My own interest in the coming drug certainly did not wane in the time. I have always had a queer little twist towards metaphysics in my mind. I have always been given to paradoxes about space and time, and it seemed to me that Gibberne was really preparing no less than the absolute acceleration of life. Suppose a man repeatedly dosed with such a preparation: he would live an active and record life indeed, but he would be an adult at eleven, middle aged at twenty five, and by thirty well on the road to senile decay. It seemed to me that so far Gibberne was only going to do for anyone

who took his drug exactly what Nature has done for the Jews and Orientals, who are men in their teens and aged by fifty, and quicker in thought and act than we are all the time. The marvel of drugs has always been great to my mind, you can maddeen a man, calm a man, make him incredibly strong and alert or a helpless log, quicken this passion and allay that, all by means of drugs, and here was a new miracle to be added to this strange armoury of phials the doctors use.' But Gibberne was far too eager upon his technical points to enter very keenly into my aspect of the question.

It was the 7th or 8th of August when he told me the distillation that would decide his failure or success for a time was going forward as we talked, and it was on the 10th that he told me the thing was done and the New Accelerator a tangible reality in the world. I met him as I was going up the Sandgate Hill towards Folkestone—I think I was going to get my hair cut, and he came hurrying down to meet me—I suppose he was coming to my house to tell me at once of his success. I remember that his eyes were unusually bright and his face flushed, and I noted even then the swift alacrity of his step.

"It's done," he cried, and gripped my hand, speaking very fast, "it's more than done. Come up to my house and see."

"Really?"

"Really!" he shouted. "Incredibly! Come up and see."

"And it does—twice?"

"It does more, much more. It scares me. Come up and see the stuff. Taste it! Try it! It's the most amazing stuff on earth." He gripped my arm and, walking at such a pace that he forced me into a trot, went shouting with me up the hill. A whole *char-a-banc*ful of people turned and stared at us in unison after the manner of people in *chars à banc*. It was one of those hot, clear days that Folkestone sees so much of, every colour incredibly bright and every outline hard. There was a breeze of course, but not so much breeze as sufficed under these conditions to keep me cool and dry. I panted for mercy.

"I PANTED FOR MERCY."

"I'm not walking fast, am I?" cried Gibberne, and slackened his pace to a quick march.

"You've been taking some of this stuff," I puffed.

"No," he said. "At the utmost a drop of water that stood in a beaker from which I

had washed out the last traces of the stuff I took some last night, you know. But that is ancient history, now."

"And it goes twice?" I said, nearing his doorway in a grateful perspiration.

"It goes a thousand times, many thousand times!" cried Gibberne, with a dramatic gesture, flinging open his Early English carved oak gate.

"Phew!" said I, and followed him to the door.

"I don't know how many times it goes," he said, with his latch key in his hand.

"And you——"

"It throws all sorts of light on nervous physiology, it kicks the theory of vision into a perfectly new shape! . . . Heaven knows how many thousand times. We'll try all that after——. The thing is to try the stuff now."

"Try the stuff?" I said, as we went along the passage.

"Rather," said Gibberne, turning on me in his study. "There it is in that little green phial there. Unless you happen to be afraid?"

I am a careful man by nature and only theoretically adventurous. I *was* afraid. But on the other hand there is pride.

"Well," I haggled. "You say you've tried it?"

"I've tried it," he said, "and I don't look hurt by it, do I? I don't even look livery and I *feel*——"

I sat down. "Give me the potion," I said. "If the worst comes to the worst it will save having my hair cut, and that I think is one of the most hateful duties of a civilized man. How do you take the mixture?"

"With water," said Gibberne, whacking down a carafe.

He stood up in front of his desk and regarded me in his easy chair, his manner was suddenly affected by a touch of the Harley Street specialist. "It's rum stuff, you know," he said.

I made a gesture with the hand.

"I must warn you in the first place as soon as you've got it down to shut your eyes, and open them very cautiously in a minute or so's time. One still sees. The sense of vision is a question of length of vibration, and not of multitude of impacts, but there's a kind of shock to the retina, a nasty giddy confusion just at the time if the eyes are open. Keep 'em shut."

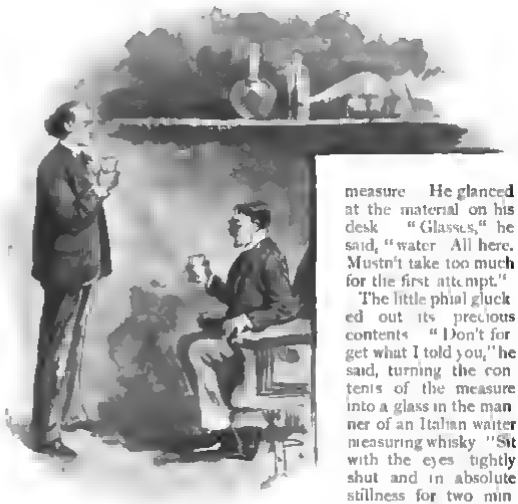
"Shut," I said. "Good."

"And the next thing is, keep still. Don't begin to whack about. You may fetch something a nasty rap if you do. Remember you will be going several thousand times faster than you ever did before, heart, lungs, muscles, brain—everything—and you will hit hard without knowing it. You won't know it, you know. You'll feel just as you do now. Only everything in the world will seem to be going ever so many thousand times slower than it ever went before. That's what makes it so deuced queer."

"Lor'," I said. "And you mean——"

"You'll see," said he, and took up a little measure. He glanced at the material on his desk. "Glasses," he said, "water. All here. Mustn't take too much for the first attempt."

The little phial gluck ed out its precious contents. "Don't forget what I told you," he said, turning the contents of the measure into a glass in the manner of an Italian waiter measuring whisky. "Sit with the eyes tightly shut and in absolute stillness for two minutes," he said. "Then you will hear me speak."



"INSTANTLY I CLOSED MY EYES."

He added an inch or so of water to the little dose in each glass

"By-the-bye," he said, "don't put your glass down. Keep it in your hand and rest your hand on the knee. Yes—so. And now——"

He raised his glass

"The New Accelerator," I said

"The New Accelerator," he answered, and we touched glasses and drank, and instantly I closed my eyes.

You know that blank non-existence into which one drops when one has taken "gas." For an indefinite interval it was like that. Then I heard Gibberne telling me to wake up, and I stirred and opened my eyes. There he stood as he had been standing, glass still in hand. It was empty, that was all the difference.

"Well?" said I.

"Nothing out of the way?"

"Nothing. A slight feeling of exhilaration, perhaps. Nothing more."

"Sounds?"

"Things are still," I said. "By Jove! yes! They *are* still. Except the sort of faint pat, patter, like rain falling on different things. What is it?"

"Analyzed sounds," I think he said, but I am not sure. He glanced at the window. "Have you ever seen a curtain before a window fixed in that way before?"

I followed his eyes, and there was the end of the curtain, frozen, as it were, corner high, in the act of flapping briskly in the breeze.

"No," said I; "that's odd."

"And here," he said, and opened the hand that held the glass. Naturally I winced, expecting the glass to smash. But so far from smashing it did not even seem to stir; it hung in mid-air—motionless. "Roughly

"IT HUNG IN MID-AIR—MOTIONLESS."

speaking," said Gibberne, "an object in these latitudes falls 16ft. in the first second. This glass is falling 16ft. in a second now. Only, you see, it hasn't been falling yet for the hundredth part of a second. That gives you some idea of the pace of my Accelerator." And he waved his hand round and round, over and under the slowly sinking glass. Finally he took it by the bottom, pulled it down and placed it very carefully on the table. "Eh?" he said to me, and laughed.

"That seems all right," I said, and began very gingerly to raise myself from my chair. I felt perfectly well, very light and comfortable, and quite confident in my mind. I was going fast all over. My heart, for

example, was beating a thousand times a second, but that caused me no discomfort at all. I looked out of the window. An immovable cyclist, head down and with a frozen puff of dust behind his driving wheel, scorched to overtake a galloping *char-à-banc* that did not stir. I gaped in amazement at the incredible spectacle. "Gibberne," I cried, "how long will this confounded stuff last?"

"Heaven knows!" he answered. "Last time I took it I went to bed and slept it off. I tell you, I was frightened. It must have lasted some minutes, I think—it seemed like hours. But after a bit it slows down rather suddenly, I believe."

I was proud to observe that I did not feel frightened. I suppose because there were two of us. "Why shouldn't we go out?" I asked.

"Why not?"

"They'll see us."

"Not they. Goodness, no! Why, we shall be going a thousand times faster than the quickest conjuring trick that was ever done. Come along! Which way shall we go? Window, or door?"

And out by the window we went.

Assuredly of all the strange experiences that I have ever had, or imagined, or read of other people having or imagining, that little raid I made with Gibberne on the Folkestone Leas, under the influence of the New Accelerator, was the strangest and maddest of all. We went out by his gate into the road, and there we made a minute examination of the statuesque passing traffic. The tops of the wheels and some of the legs of the horses of this *char-à-banc*, the end of the whip-lash and the lower jaw of the conductor—who was just beginning to yawn—were perceptibly in motion, but all the rest of the lumbering conveyance seemed still. And quite noiseless except for a faint rattling that came from one man's throat! And as parts of this frozen edifice there were a driver, you know, and a conductor, and eleven people! The effect as we walked about the thing began by being madly queer and ended by being—disagreeable. There they were, people like ourselves and yet not like ourselves, frozen in careless attitudes, caught in midgesture. A girl and a man smiled at one another, a leering smile that threatened to last for evermore; a woman in a floppy capelline rested her arm on the rail and stared at Gibberne's house with the unwinking stare of eternity; a man stroked his moustache like a figure of wax, and another stretched a tiresome stiff hand with extended fingers towards his loosened hat. We stared at them, we laughed at them, we made faces at them, and then a sort of disgust of them came upon us, and we turned away and walked round in front of the cyclist towards the Leas.

"Goodness!" cried Gibberne, suddenly, "look there!"

He pointed, and there at the tip of his finger and sliding down the air with wings flapping slowly and at the speed of an exceptionally languid snail—was a bee.

And so we came out upon the Leas. There the thing seemed madder than ever. The band was playing in the upper stand, though all the sound it made for us was a low-pitched, wheezy rattle, a sort of prolonged last sigh that passed at times into a sound like the slow, muffled ticking of some monstrous clock. Frozen people stood erect, strange, silent, self-conscious-looking dummies hung unstably in mid-stride, promenading upon the grass. I passed close to a little poodle dog suspended in the act of leaping and watched the slow movement of his legs as he sank to earth. "Lord, look *here!*" cried Gibberne, and we halted for a moment before a magnificent person in white faint-striped flannels, white shoes, and a Panama hat, who turned back to wink at two gaily dressed ladies he had passed. A wink, studied with such leisurely deliberation as we could afford, is an unattractive thing. It loses any quality of alert gaiety, and one remarks that the winking eye does not completely close, that under its drooping lid appears the lower edge of an eyeball and a little line of white. "Heaven give me memory," said I, "and I will never wink again."

"Or smile," said Gibberne, with his eye on the lady's answering teeth.

"It's infernally hot, somehow," said I. "Let's go slower."

"Oh, come along!" said Gibberne.

We picked our way among the bath chairs in the path. Many of the people sitting in the chairs seemed almost natural in their passive poses, but the contorted scarlet of the bandsmen was not a restful thing to see. A purple-faced little gentleman was frozen in the midst of a violent struggle to refold his newspaper against the wind; there were many evidences that all these people in their sluggish way were exposed to a considerable breeze, a breeze that had no existence so far as our sensations went. We came out and walked a little way from the

crowd, and turned and regarded it. To see all that multitude changed to a picture, smitten rigid, as it were, into the semblance of realistic wax, was impossibly wonderful. It was absurd, of course; but it filled me with an irrational, an exultant sense of superior advantage. Consider the wonder of it! All that I had said, and thought, and done since the stuff had begun to work in my veins had happened, so far as those people, so far as the world in general went, in the twinkling of an eye. "The New Accelerator——" I began, but Gibberne interrupted me.

"There's that infernal old woman!" he said.

"What old woman?"

"Lives next door to me," said Gibberne. "Has a lapdog that yaps. Gods! The temptation is strong!"

There is something very boyish and impulsive about Gibberne at times. Before I could expostulate with him he had dashed forward, snatched the unfortunate animal out of visible existence, and was running violently with it towards the cliff of the Leas. It was most extraordinary. The little brute, you know, didn't bark or wriggle or make the slightest sign of vitality. It kept quite stiffly in an attitude of somnolent repose, and Gibberne held it by the neck. It was like running about with a dog of wood. "Gibberne," I cried, "put it down!" Then I said something else. "If you run like that, Gibberne," I cried, "you'll set your clothes on fire. Your linen trousers are going brown as it is!"

"WITH A TREMENDOUS SWEEP OF THE ARM HE HURLED THE DOG AWAY FROM HIM."

He clapped his hand on his thigh and stood hesitating on the verge. "Gibberne," I cried, coming up, "put it down. This heat is too much! It's our running so! Two or three miles a second! Friction of the air!"

"What?" he said, glancing at the dog.

"Friction of the air," I shouted. "Friction of the air. Going too fast. Like meteorites and things. Too hot. And, Gibberne! Gibberne! I'm all over pricking and a sort of perspiration. You can see people stirring slightly. I believe the stuff's working off! Put that dog down."

"Eh?" he said.

"It's working off," I repeated. "We're too hot and the stuff's working off! I'm wet through."

He stared at me. Then at the band, the wheezy rattle of whose performance was certainly going faster. Then

with a tremendous sweep of the arm he hurled the dog away from him and it went spinning upward, still inanimate, and hung at last over the grouped parasols of a knot of chattering people. Gibberne was gripping my elbow. "By Jove!" he cried. "I believe it is! A sort of hot pricking and—yes. That man's moving his pocket-handkerchief! Perceptibly. We must get out of this sharp."

But we could not get out of it sharply enough. Luckily perhaps! For we might have run, and if we had run we should, I believe, have burst into flames. Almost certainly we should have burst into flames! You know we had neither of us thought of that. . . . But before we could even begin to run the action of the drug had ceased. It was the business of a minute fraction of a second. The effect of the New Accelerator passed like the drawing of a curtain, vanished in the movement of a hand.

I heard Gibberne's voice in infinite alarm "Sit down," he said, and flop, down upon the turf at the edge of the Leas I sat—scorching as I sat. There is a patch of burnt grass there still where I sat down. The whole stagnation seemed to wake up as I did so, the disarticulated vibration of the band rushed together into a blast of music, the promenaders put their feet down and walked their ways, the papers and flags began flapping, smiles passed into words, the winker finished his wink and went on his way complacently, and all the seated people moved and spoke.

The whole world had come alive again, was going as fast as we were, or rather we were going no faster than the rest of the world. It was like slowing down as one comes into a railway station. Everything seemed to spin round for a second or two, I had the most transient feeling of nausea, and that was all. And the little dog which had seemed to hang for a moment when the force of Gibberne's arm was expended fell with a swift acceleration clean through a lady's parasol!

That was the saving of us. Unless it was for one corpulent old gentleman in a bath-chair, who certainly did start at the sight of us and afterwards regarded us at intervals with a darkly suspicious eye, and, finally, I believe, said something to his nurse about us, I doubt if a solitary person remarked our sudden appearance among them. Flop! We must have appeared abruptly. We ceased to smoulder almost at once, though the turf beneath me was uncomfortably hot. The attention of everyone—including even the Amusements' Association band, which on this occasion, for the only time in its history, got out of tune—was arrested by the amazing fact, and the still more amazing yapping and uproar caused by the fact, that a respectable, over-fed lapdog sleeping quietly to the east of the bandstand should suddenly fall through the parasol of a lady on the west—in a slightly singed condition due to the extreme velocity of its movements through the air. In these absurd days, too, when we are all trying to be as psychic, and silly, and superstitious as possible! People got up and trod on other people, chairs were overturned, the Leas policeman ran. How the matter settled itself I do not know—we were much too anxious to disentangle ourselves from the affair and get out of range of the eye of the old gentleman in the bath-chair to

IT FELL UP AND TRIED ON OTHER PEOPLE.

make minute inquiries. As soon as we were sufficiently cool and sufficiently recovered from our giddiness and nausea and confusion of mind to do so we stood up and, skirting the crowd, directed our steps back along the road below the Metropole towards Gibberne's house. But amidst the din I heard very

distinctly the gentleman who had been sitting beside the lady of the ruptured sun-shade using quite unjustifiable threats and language to one of those chair-attendants who have "Inspector" written on their caps "If you didn't throw the dog," he said, "who *did* I"

The sudden return of movement and familiar noises, and our natural anxiety about ourselves (our clothes were still dreadfully hot, and the fronts of the thighs of Gibberne's white trousers were scorched a drabbish brown), prevented the minute observations I should have liked to make on all these things. Indeed, I really made no observations of any scientific value on that return. The bee, of course, had gone. I looked for that cyclist, but he was already out of sight as we came into the Upper Sandgate Road or hidden from us by traffic; the *char-à-banc*, however, with its people now all alive and stirring, was clattering along at a spanking pace almost abreast of the nearer church.

We noted, however, that the window-sill on which we had stepped in getting out of the house was slightly singed, and that the impressions of our feet on the gravel of the path were unusually deep.

So it was I had my first experience of the New Accelerator. Practically we had been running about and saying and doing all sorts of things in the space of a second or so of time. We had lived half an hour while the band had played, perhaps, two bars. But the effect it had upon us was that the whole world had stopped for our convenient inspection. Considering all things, and particularly considering our rashness in venturing out of the house, the experience might certainly have been much more disagreeable than it was. It showed, no doubt, that Gibberne has still much to learn before his preparation is a manageable convenience, but its practicability it certainly demonstrated beyond all cavil.

Since that adventure he has been steadily bringing its use under control, and I have several times, and without the slightest bad result, taken measured doses under his direction; though I must confess I have not yet ventured abroad again while under its influence. I may mention, for example, that this story has been written at one sitting and without interruption, except for the nibbling of some chocolate, by its means. I began at 6 25, and my watch is now very nearly at the minute past the half-hour. The convenience of securing a long, uninterrupted spell of work in the midst of a day full of engagements cannot be exaggerated. Gibberne is now working at the quantitative handling of his preparation, with especial reference to its distinctive effects upon different types of constitution. He then hopes to find a Retarder with which to dilute its present rather excessive potency. The Retarder will, of course, have the reverse effect to the Accelerator, used alone it should enable the patient to spread a few seconds over many hours of ordinary time, and so to maintain an apathetic inaction, a glacier-like absence of alacrity, amidst the most animated or irritating surroundings. The two things together must necessarily work an entire revolution in civilized existence. It is the beginning of our escape from that Time Garment of which Carlyle speaks. While this Accelerator will enable us to concentrate ourselves with tremendous vigour upon any moment or occasion that demands our utmost sense and vigour, the Retarder will enable us to pass in passive tranquillity through infinite hardship and tedium. Perhaps I am a little optimistic about the Retarder, which has indeed still to be discovered, but about the Accelerator there is no possible sort of doubt whatever. Its appearance upon the market in a convenient, controllable, and assimilable form is a matter of the next few months. It will be obtainable of all chemists and druggists, in small green bottles, at a high but, considering its extraordinary qualities, by no means excessive price. Gibberne's Nervous Accelerator it will be called, and he hopes to be able to supply it in three strengths: one in 200, one in 900, and one in 2,000, distinguished by yellow, pink, and white labels respectively.

No doubt its use renders a great number of very extraordinary things possible; for, of course, the most remarkable and, possibly, even criminal proceedings may be effected with impunity by thus dodging, as it were, into the interstices of time. Like all potent preparations it will be liable to abuse. We have, however, discussed this aspect of the question very thoroughly, and we have decided that this is purely a matter of medical jurisprudence and altogether outside our province. We shall manufacture and sell the Accelerator, and, as for the consequences—we shall see.

The Last Stand of the Decapods

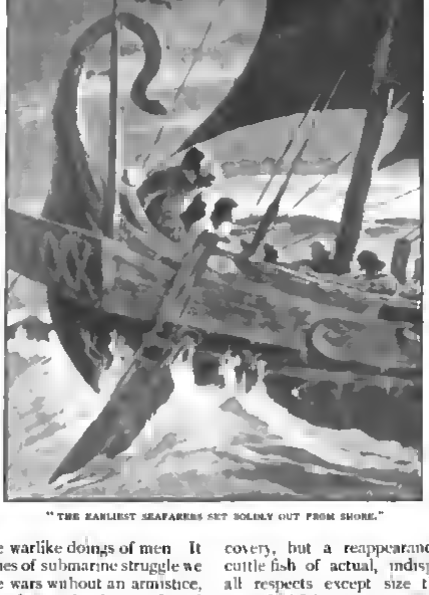
By Frank T Bullen, F R G S.

PROBABLY few of the thinking inhabitants of dry land, with all their craving for tales of the marvellous, the gloomy, and the gigantic, have in these later centuries of the world's history given much thought to the conditions of constant warfare existing beneath the surface of the ocean. As readers of ancient classics well know, the fathers of literature gave much attention to the vast, awe-inspiring inhabitants of the sea, investing and embellishing the few fragments of fact concerning them which were available with a thousand fantastic inventions of their own naïve imaginations, until there emerged—chief and ruler of them all—the Kraken, Leviathan, or whatever other local name was considered to best convey in one word their accumulated ideas of terror. In lesser degree, but still worthy compeers of the fire-breathing dragon and sky darkening "Rukh" of earth and sky, a worthy host of attendant sea-monsters were conjured up, until, apart from the terror of loneliness, of irresistible fury, and instability that the sea presented to primitive peoples, the awful nature of its supposed inhabitants made the contemplation of an ocean journey sufficient to appal the stoutest heart.

A better understanding of this aspect of the sea to early voyagers may be obtained from some of the artistic efforts of those days than from anything else. There you shall see gigantic creatures with human faces, teeth like foot-long wedges, armour-plated bodies, and massive feet fitted with claws like scythe-blades calmly issuing from the waves to prey upon the dwellers on the margin, or devouring with much apparent enjoyment ships with their crews, as a child crunches a stick of barley sugar. Even such innocent-looking animals as the seals were distorted and decorated until the contemplation of their counterfeit presentment is sufficient to give a healthy man the nightmare, whilst such monsters as really were so terrible of aspect that they could hardly be "improved" upon were increased in size until they resembled islands whereon whole tribes might live. To these chimeras were credited all natural phenomena such as waterspouts, whirlpools, and the upheaval of submarine volcanoes. Some imaginative peoples went even farther than that by attributing the support of the whole earth to a vast sea-monster, while others, like the ancient Jews, fondly pictured Leviathan awaiting in the solitude and gloom of ocean's depths the glad day of Israel's reunion, when the mountain ranges of his flesh would be ready to furnish forth the family feast for all the myriads of Abraham's children.

Surely we may pause awhile to contemplate the overmastering courage of the earliest seafarers who, in spite of all these terrors, unappalled by the comparison between their tiny shallops and the mighty waves that towered above them, set boldly out from shore into the unknown, obeying that deeply-rooted instinct of migration which has peopled every habitable part of the earth's surface. Those who remember their childhood's dread of the dark, with its possible population of bogeys, who have ever been lost in early youth in some lonely place, can have some dim conception—though only a dim one, after all—of the inward battle these ancients fought and won until it became possible for the epigram to be written most truly—

> The seas but join the nations they divide.



"THE EARLIEST SEAFARERS SET BOLDLY OUT FROM SHORE."

But after all we are not now concerned with the warlike doings of men. It is with the actualities of submarine struggle we wish to deal, those wars without an armistice, where to be defeated is to be devoured, and from the sea shouldering whale down to the smallest sea insect every living thing is carnivorous, dependent directly upon the flesh of its neighbours for its own life, and incapable of altruism in any form whatever, except among certain of the mammalia and sharks. In dealing with the more heroic phases of this unending warfare, then, it must be said once for all that the ancient writers had a great deal of reason on their side. They distorted and exaggerated, of course, as all children do, but they did not disbelieve. But moderns, rushing to the opposite extreme, have neglected the marvels of the sea by the simple process of disbelieving in them, except in the case of *the* sea-serpent, that myth which seems bound to persist for ever and ever. Only of late years have the savants of the world allowed themselves to be convinced of the existence of a far more wondrous monster than the sea-serpent (if that "loathly worm" were a reality), the original kraken of old-world legends.

Hugest of all the molluscs, whose prevailing characteristics are ughness, ferocity, and unappeasable hunger, he has lately asserted himself so firmly that current imaginative literature bristles with allusions to him, albeit oftentimes in situations where he could by no possibility be found. No matter, he has supplied a long-felt want, but the curious fact remains that he is not a discovery, but a reappearance. The gigantic cuttle-fish of actual, indisputable fact is in all respects except size the kraken, and any faithful representation of him will justify the assertion that no imagination could add anything to the terror-breeding potentialities of his aspect. That is so, even when he is viewed by the light of day in the helplessness of death, or disabling sickness, or in the invincible grip of his only conqueror. In his proper realm, crouching far below the surface of the sea in some coral cave or labyrinth of rocks, he must present a sight so awful that the imagination recoils before it. For, consider him but a little. He possesses a cylindrical body reaching, in the largest specimens yet recorded as having been seen,

a length of between 60ft and 70ft., with an average girth of half that amount. That is to say, considerably larger than a Pullman railway-car.

Now, this immense mass is of boneless, gelatinous matter capable of much greater distension than the body of a snake, so that in the improbable event of his obtaining an extra-abundant supply of food it is competent to swell to the occasion, and still give the flood of digestive juices that it secretes full opportunity to dispose of the burden with almost incredible rapidity. Now, the apex of this mighty cylinder—I had almost said "tail," but remembered that it would give a wrong impression, since it is the part of the monster that always comes first when he is moving from place to place—is conical, that is to say, it tapers off to a blunt point something like a Whitehead torpedo. Near this apex there is a broad fin-like arrangement looking much like the body of a skate without its tail, which, however, is used strictly for steering purposes only.

So far, there is nothing particularly striking about the appearance of this vast cylinder except in colour. This characteristic varies in different individuals, but is always reminiscent of the hues of a very light coloured leopard, that is to say, the ground is of a livid greenish white, while the detail is in splashes and spots of lurid red and yellow, with an occasional nimbus of pale blue around these deeper markings. But it is the head of the monster that appals. Nature would seem, in the construction of this greatest of all molluscs, to have combined every weapon of offence possessed by the rest of the animal kingdom in one amazing arsenal, disposing them in such a manner that not only are they capable of terrific destruction, but their appearance defies adequate description.

The trunk at the head end is sheath like, its terminating edges forming a sort of collar around the vast cable of muscles without a fragment of bone that connect it with the head. Through a large opening within this collar is pumped a jet of water, the pressure of which upon the surrounding sea is sufficiently great to drive the whole hulk of the creature, weighing perhaps sixty or seventy tons, *backward* through the water at the rate of sixteen to twenty miles per hour. Not in steady progression, of course, but by successive leaps. At will, this propelling jet is deeply stained with sepia, a dark brown, inky fluid, that, mingling with the encompassing sea, fills all the neighbourhood of the monster with a gloom so deep that nothing save one of its own species can see either to fight or whither to fly. The head itself is of proportionate size. It is rounded underneath and of much lighter hue than the trunk. On either side of it is set an eye of such dimensions that the mere statement of them sounds like the efforts of one of those grand old mediæval romancers whose sole object was to make their readers' flesh creep.

It is perfectly safe to say that, even in proportion to size, no other known creature has such organs of vision as the cuttle-fish, for the pupils of such a one as I am now describing are fully 4ft. in diameter. They are perfectly black, with a dead white rim, and cannot be closed. No doubt their enormous size is for the purpose of enabling their possessor to discern what is going on amidst the thick darkness that he himself has raised, so that while all other organisms are groping blindly in the gloom, he may work his will among them. Then come the weapons which give the cuttle-fish its power of destruction, the arms or tentacles. These are not eight in number as in the octopus, an ugly beast enough and spiteful withal, but a babe of innocence compared with our present subject. Every school-boy should know that *octopus* signifies an eight-armed or eight-footed creature, and yet in nine cases out of ten where writers of fiction and would-be teachers of fact are describing the deadly doings of the gigantic cuttle-fish they call *him* an octopus, whereas he is nothing of the kind. For in addition to the eight arms which the octopus possesses the cuttle-fish flaunts two, each of which is double the length of the other eight, making him a *decapod*. This confusion is the more unpardonable because even the most ancient of scribes always spoke of this mollusc as the "ten-armed one," while a reference to any standard work on natural history will show even the humbler cuttle-fish with their full complement of arms, that is, ten. But this is digression.

Our friend, then, has ten arms springing from the crown of his head, of which eight are about 40ft. in length and two are 70ft. to 80ft. The eight each taper outward from the head, from the thickness of a stout man's body at the base to the slenderness of a whip-lash at the end. On their inner sides they are studded with saucer-like hollows, each of which has a fringe of curving claws set just within its rim. So that in addition to their power of holding on to anything they touch

by a suction so severe that it would strip flesh from bone, these cruel claws, large as those of a full-grown tiger, get to work upon the subject being held, lacerating and tearing until the quivering body yields up its innermost secrets. Each of these destroying, serpent like arms is also gifted with an almost independent power of volition. Whatever it touches it holds with an unreleasable grip, but with wonderful celerity it brings its prey inwards to where in the centre of all those infernal purveyors lies a black chasm whose edges are shaped like the upper and lower mandibles of a parrot, and these complete the work so well begun.

The outliers, those two far-reaching tentacles, unlike the busy eight, are comparatively slender from their bases to within 2ft. or so of their ends. There they expand into broad, paddle-like masses thickly studded with *acetabulæ*, those holding, sucking discs that garnish the inner arms for their entire length. So, thus armed, this nightmare monstrosity crouches in the darkling depths of ocean like some unimaginable web whereof every line is alive to hold and tear. Its digestion is like a furnace of dissolution needing a continual inflow of flesh, and nothing living that inhabits the sea comes amiss to its never-satisfied cravings. It is very near the apex of the pyramid of interdependence into which sea life is built, but not quite. For at the summit is the sperm whale, the monarch of all seas, whom man alone is capable of meeting in fair fight and overcoming.

THE DARKLING DEPTHS OF OCEAN

The head of the sperm whale is of heroic size, being in bulk quite one-third of the entire body, but in addition to its size it has characteristics that fit it peculiarly to compete with such a dangerous monster as the gigantic decapod. Imagine a solid block of crude india rubber, between 20ft. and 30ft. in length and 8ft. through, in shape not at all unlike a railway carriage, but perfectly smooth in surface. Let this mass beneath with a movable shaft of solid bone 20ft. in length studded with teeth, each protruding 9in. and resembling the points of an elephant's tusks. You will then have a fairly complete notion of the equipment with which the ocean monarch goes into battle against the kraken. And behind it lies the warm blood of the mammal, the massive framework of bone belonging to the highly developed vertebrate animal, governed by a brain impelled by irresistible instinct to seek its sustenance where alone it can be found in sufficiently satisfying bulk. And there for you are the outlines of the highest form of animal warfare existing within our ken—a conflict of Titans, to which a combat between elephants and rhinoceri in the jungle is but as the play of school boys compared with the gladiatorial combats of Ancient Rome.

This somewhat lengthy preamble is necessary in order to clear the way for an account of the proceedings leading up to the final subjugation of the huge molluscs of the elder slime to the needs of the great vertebrates

like the whales, who were gradually emerging into a higher development, and, finding new wants oppressing them, had to obey the universal law and fight for the satisfaction of their urgent needs. Fortunately the period with which we have to deal was before chronology, so that we are not hampered by dates, and as the disposition of sea and land, except in its main features, was altogether different to what we have long been accustomed to regard as the always existing geographical order of things, we need not be greatly troubled by place considerations either.

What must be considered as the first beginning of the long struggle occurred when some predecessors of the present sperm whales, wandering through the vast morasses and among the sombre forests of that earlier world, were compelled to recognise that the conditions of shore life were rapidly becoming too onerous for them. Their immensely weighty bodies lumbering slowly as a seal does over the rugged land surface handicapped them more and more in the universal business of life, the procuring of food. Not only so, but as by reason of their slowness they were confined for hunting grounds to a very limited area, the slower organisms upon which their vast appetites were fed grew scarcer and scarcer in spite of the fecundity of that prolific time. And in proportion as they found it more and more difficult to get a living, so did their enemies grow more numerous and bolder. Vast dragon-like shapes, clad in complete armour that clanged as the wide-spreading bat-wings bore them swiftly through the air, descended upon the sluggish whales, and with horrid rending by awful shear-shaped jaws, plentifully furnished with foot-long teeth, speedily stripped from their gigantic bodies the masses of succulent flesh. Other enemies weird of shape and swift of motion, although confined to the earth, fastened also upon the easily attainable prey that provided flesh in such bountiful abundance and was unable to fight or flee.

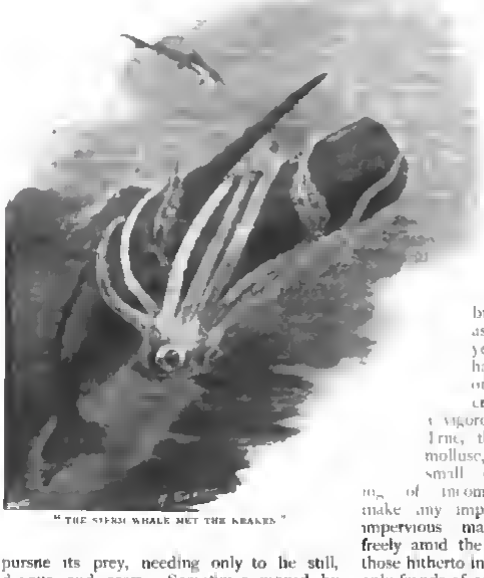
Well was it, then, for the whales that, living always near the sea, they had formed aquatic habits, finding in the limpid element a medium wherein their huge bulk was rather a help than a hindrance to them. Gradually they grew to use the land less and less as they became more and more accustomed to the food provided in plenty by the inexhaustible ocean, continual practice enabled them to husband the supplies of air which they took in on the surface for use beneath the waves; and, better still, they found that, whereas they had been victims to many a monster on land whose proportions and potentialities seemed far inferior to their own, here, in their new element, they were supreme—nothing living but fled from before them.

But presently a strange thing befell them. As they grew less and less inclined to use the dry land they found that their powers of locomotion thereon gradually became less and less until at last their hind legs dwindled away and disappeared. Their vast and far-reaching tails lost their length and their bones spread out laterally into flexible fans of toughest gristle, with which they could propel themselves through the waves at speeds to which their swiftest progress upon land had been but a snail's crawl. Also their fore-legs grew shorter and wider, and the separation of the toes disappeared, until all that was left of these once ponderous supports were elegant fan-like flippers of gristle, of not the slightest use for propulsion, but merely acting as steadying vanes to keep the whole great structure in its proper position according to the will of the owner.

All these radical physical changes, however, had not affected the real classification of the whales. They were still mammals, still retained in the element which was now entirely their habitat the high organization belonging to the great carnivora of the land. Therefore, it took them no long period of time to realize that in the ocean they would be paramount—that with the tremendous facilities for rapid movement afforded them by their new element they were able to maintain that supremacy against all comers, unless their formidable armed jaws should also become modified by degeneration into some such harmless cavities for absorbing food as were possessed by their distant relatives the mysticetæ, or toothless whales.

With a view to avoiding any such disaster they made good use of their jaws, having been taught by experience that the simple but effectual penalty for the neglect of any function, whether physical or mental, was the disappearance of the organs whereby such functions had been performed. But their energetic use of teeth and jaws had a result entirely unforeseen by them. Gradually the prey they sought, the larger fish and smaller sea-mammals, disappeared from the shallow seas adjacent to the land from whence the whales had been driven. And in order to satisfy the demands of their huge stomachs they were fain to follow their prey into deeper and deeper waters, meeting as they went with

other and stranger denizens of those mysterious depths, until at last the sperm whale met the kraken. There in his native gloom, vast, formless, and insatiable, brooded the awful Thing. Spread like a living net whereof every mesh was armed, sensitive and lethal, this fantastic complication of horrors took toll of all the sea folk, needing not to pursue its prey, needing only to lie still, devour, and grow. Sometimes moved by mysterious impulses one of these chimeras would rise to the sea surface and bask in the beams of the offended sun, poisoning the surrounding air with its charnel house odours, and occasionally finding within the never resting, nervous clutching of its tentacles some specimens of the highest, latest product of Creation, man himself. Ages of such experiences as these had left the kraken defenceless as to his body. The absence of any necessity for exertion had arrested the development of a backbone, the inability of any of the sea people to retaliate upon their sateless foe had made him neglect any of those precautions that weaker organisms had provided themselves with; and even the cloud of sepia with which all the race were provided, and which often assisted the innocent and weaker members of the same great family to escape, was only used by these masters of the sea to hide their monstrous lures from their prey.



"THE SPERM WHALE MET THE KRAKEN."

Thus on a momentous day a ravenous sperm whale, hunting eagerly for wherewithal to satisfy his craving, suddenly found himself encircled by many long, cable-like arms. They clung, they tore, they sucked. But whenever a stray end of them flung itself across the bristling parapet of the whale's lower jaw it was promptly bitten off, and, a portion having found its way down into the craving stomach of the big mammal, it was welcomed as good beyond all other food yet encountered. Once this had been realized, what had originally been an accidental entrapping changed itself into a vigorous onslaught and banquet. True, the darkness fought for the mollusc, but that advantage was small compared with the feeling of incompetence, of inability to make any impression upon this mighty, impervious mass that was moving as freely amid the clinging embarrassments of those hitherto invincible arms as if they were only fronds of seaweed. And then the foul mass of the kraken found itself, contrary to all previous experience, rising involuntarily, being compelled to leave its infernal shades, and without any previous preparation for such a change of pressure to visit the upper air. The fact was that the whale, finding its stock of air exhausted, had put forth a supreme effort to rise, and found that although unable to free himself from those enormous cables he was actually competent to raise the whole mass. What an upheaval! Even the birds that, allured by the strong carrion scent, were assembling in their thousands fled

away from that appalling vision, their wild screams of affright filling the air with lamentation. The tormented sea foamed and boiled in wide-spreading whirls, its deep sweet blue changed into an unhealthy nondescript tint of muddy yellow. Then the whale, having renewed his store of air, settled down seriously to the demolition of his prize.

"THE WHALE SETTLED DOWN SERIOUSLY TO THE DEMOLITION OF HIS PRIZE."

Length after length of tentacle was torn away from the central crown and swallowed, gliding down the abysmal throat of the gratified mammal in snaky convolutions until even his great store-room would contain no more.

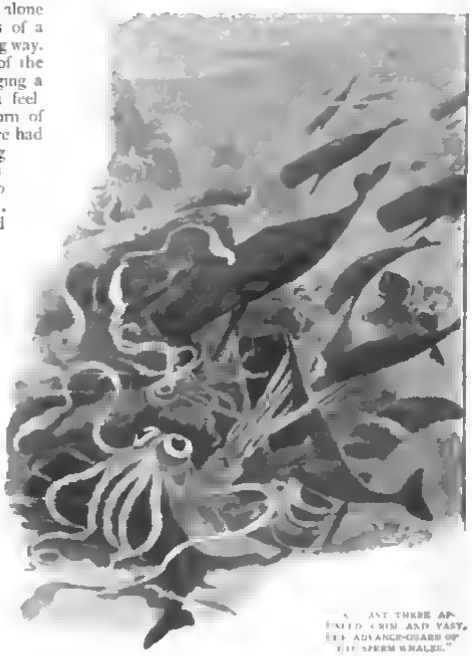
The vanquished kraken lay helplessly rolling upon the wave, while its conqueror in satisfied ease lolled near watching with good-humoured complacency the puny assaults made upon that island of gelatinous flesh by the multitude of smaller hungry things. The birds returned reassured, and added by their clamour to the strangeness of the scene where the tribes of air and sea, self-bidden to the enormous banquet, were making full use of their exceptional privilege. So the great feast continued, while the red sun went down and the white moon rose in placid beauty. Yet, for all the combined assaults of those hungry multitudes, the tenacious life of that largest of living things lay so deeply seated that when the rested whale resumed his attentions he found the body of his late antagonist still quivering under the attack of his tremendous jaws. Still, its proportions were so immense that his utmost efforts left store sufficient for at least a dozen of his companions, had they been there, to have satisfied their hunger upon. And satisfied at last he turned away, allowing the smaller fry, who had waited his pleasure most respectfully, to close in again and finish the work he had so well begun.

Now this was a momentous discovery indeed. For the sperm whales had experienced, even when fish and seals were plentiful, great difficulty in procuring sufficient food at one time for a full meal, and the problem of how to provide for themselves as they grew and multiplied had become increasingly hard to solve. Therefore, this discovery filled the fortunate pioneer with triumph, for his high instincts told him that he had discovered a new source of supply that promised to be inexhaustible. So, in the manner common to his people, he wasted no time in convening a gathering of them as large as could be collected. Far over the glassy surface of that quiet sea lay gently rocking a multitude of vast black bodies,

all expectant, all awaiting the momentous declaration presently to be made. The epoch making news circulated among them in perfect silence, for to them has from the earliest times been known the secret that is only just beginning to glimmer upon the verge of human intelligence, the ability to communicate with one another without the aid of speech, sight, or touch — a kind of thought-transference, if such an idea as animal thought may be held allowable. And having thus learned of the treasures held in trust for them by the deep waters they separated and went, some alone and some in compact parties of a dozen or so, upon their rejoicing way.

But among the slimy hosts of the gigantic molluscs there was raging a sensation unknown before — a feeling of terror, of insecurity born of the knowledge that at last there had appeared among them a being proof against the utmost pressure of their awful arms, who was too great to be devoured, who on the other hand had evinced a greedy partiality for devouring them. How this information became common property among them it is impossible to say, since they dwelt alone each in his own particular lair, rigidly respected by one another, because any intrusion upon another's domains was invariably followed by the absorption of either the intruder or the intruded upon by the stronger of the two. This, although not intended by them, had the effect of vastly heightening the fear with which they were regarded by the smaller sea folk, for they took to a restless prowling along the sea bed, enwreathing themselves about the mighty bases of the islands and invading cool, coral caverns where their baleful presence had been till then unknown. Never before had there been such a panic among the multitudinous sea populations. What could this new portent signify? Were the foundations of the great deep again about to be broken up and the sea bed heaved upward to replace the tops of the towering mountains on dry land? There was no reply, for there were none that could answer questions like these.

Still the fear smitten decapods wandered, seeking seclusion from the coming enemy and finding none to their mind. Still the crowds of their victims rushed blindly from shoal to shoal, plunging into depths unfitted for them, or rising into shallows where their natural food was not. And the whole sea was troubled. Until at last there appeared,



"AND THERE APPEARED GRIM AND VAST, THE ADVANCE-GUARD OF THE SPERM WHALES."

grim and vast, the advance guard of the sperm whales and hurled themselves with joyful anticipation upon the shrinking convolutions of those hideous monsters that had so long dominated the dark places of the sea.

For the whales it was a time of feasting hitherto without parallel. Without any fear,

uncaring to take even the most elementary precautions against a defeat which they felt to be an impossible contingency, they sought out and devoured one after another of these vast ughinesses, already looked upon by them as their natural provision, their store of food accumulated of purpose against their coming Occasionally, it is true, some rash youngster, full of pride and rejoicing in his pre-eminence over all life in the depths, would hurl himself into a smoky network of far-spreading tentacles, which would wrap him round so completely that his jaws were fast bound together, his flukes would vainly essay to propel him anywhither, and he would presently perish miserably, his cable-like sinews falling slackly and his lungs suffused with crimson brine. Even then, the advantage gained by the triumphant kraken was a barren one, for in every case the bulk of the victim was too great, his body too firm in its build for the victor, despite his utmost efforts, to succeed in devouring his prize. So that the disappointed kraken had perforce to witness the gradual disappearance of his lawful prize beneath the united efforts of myriads of tiny sea-scavengers, secure in their insignificance against any attack from him, and await with tremors extending to the remotest extremity of every tentacle the retribution which, he felt sure, would speedily follow.

This desultory warfare was waged for long until, driven by despair to a community of interest unknown before, the krakens gradually sought one another out with but a single idea—that of combining against the new enemy. For, knowing to what an immense size their kind could attain in the remoter fastnesses of ocean, they could not yet bring themselves to believe that they were to become the helpless prey of these new-comers, visitors of yesterday, coming from the cramped acreage of the land into the limitless fields of ocean, and invading the immemorial freeholds of its hitherto unassailable sovereigns.

From the remotest recesses of ocean they came, that grisly gathering, came in ever-increasing hosts, their silent progress spreading unprecedented dismay among the furer inhabitants of the sea. Figure to yourselves, if you can, the advance of this terrible army! But the effort is vain. Not even Martin, that frenzied delineator of the frightful halls of Hell, the terrors of the Apocalypse, and the agonies of the Deluge, could have done justice to the terrors of such a picture. Only dimly can we imagine what must have been the appearance of those vast masses of writhing flesh, as through the palely gleaming phosphorescence of those depths they sped backwards in leaps of a hundred fathoms each, their terrible arms, close clustered together, streaming behind them like Medusa's hair magnified ten thousand times in size, and with each snaky tress bearing a thousand mouths instead of one.

So they converged upon the place of meeting—an area of the sea-bed nowhere more than 500 fathoms in depth, from whose rugged floor rose irregularly stupendous columnar masses of lava, hurled upwards by the cosmic forces below in a state of incandescence, and solidified as they rose, assuming many fantastic shapes and affording perfect harbourage to such dire scourges of the sea as were now making the place their rendezvous. For, strangely enough, this marvellous portion of the submarine world was more densely peopled with an infinite variety of sea-folk than any other. Its tepid waters seemed to bring forth abundantly of all kinds of fish, crustacea, and creeping things. Sharks in all their fearsome varieties prowled greasily about scenting for dead things whereon to gorge; shell-fish, from the infinitesimal globigerina up to the gigantic tridacna, whose shells were a yard each in diameter; crabs, lobsters, and other freakish varieties of crustacea of a size and ughiness unknown to-day lurked in every crevice, while about and among all these scavengers flitted the happy, lovely fish in myriads of glorious hues, matching the tender shades of the coral groves that sprang from the summits of those sombre pillars beneath. Hitherto this happy hunting-ground had not been invaded by the sea-mammals. None of the air-breathing inhabitants of the ocean had ventured into its gloomy depths or sought their prey among the blazing shallows of the surface reefs, although no more favourable place for their exertions could possibly have been selected over all the wide seas. It had long been a favourite haunt of the kraken, for whom it was, as aforesaid, an ideal spot, but now it was to witness a sight unparalleled in ocean history. Heralded by an amazing series of under-waves, the gathering of monsters grew near. They numbered many thousands, and no one in all their hosts was of lesser magnitude than sixty feet long by thirty in girth of body alone. From that size they increased until some, the acknowledged leaders, discovered themselves like islands, their cylindrical carcasses huge

as that of an ocean liner and their tentacles capable of overspreading an entire village.

In concentric rings they assembled, all heads pointing outward, the mightiest within, and four clear avenues through the circles left for coming and going. Contrary to custom, but by mutual consent, all the tentacles lay closely arranged in parallel lines, not outspread to every quarter of the compass and all a-work. They looked indeed in their inertia and silence like nothing so much as an incalculable number of dead squid of enormous size neatly laid out at the whim of some giant's fancy. Yet communication between them was active, a subtle interchange of experiences and plans went briskly on through the medium of the mobile element around them. The elder and mightier were full of disdain at the reports they were furnished with, utterly incredulous as to the ability of any created thing to injure them, and as the time wore on an occasional tremor was distinctly noticeable through the whole length of their tentacles which boded no good to their smaller brethren. Doubtless but little longer was needed for the development of a great absorption of the weaker by the stronger, only that darting into their midst like a lightning streak came a messenger squid bearing the news that a school of sperm whales numbering ar least a thousand were coming at top-speed direct for their place of meeting. Instantly to the farthest confines of that mighty gathering the message radiated, and as if by one movement there uprose from the sea-bed so dense a cloud of sepia that for many miles around the clear bright blue of the ocean became turbid, stagnant, and foul. Even the birds that hovered over those dark-brown waves took fright at this terrible phenomenon, to them utterly incomprehensible, and with discordant shrieks they fled in search of sweeter air and cleaner sea. But below the surface, under cover of this thickest darkness, there was the silence of death.

Twenty miles away, under the bright sunshine, an advance guard of about a hundred sperm whales came rushing on. Line abreast, their bushy breath rising like the regular steam-jets from a row of engines, they dashed aside the welcoming wavelets, every sense alert and full of eagerness for the consummation of their desires. Such had been their dispatch that throughout the long journey of 500 leagues they had not once stayed for food, so that they were ravenous with hunger as well as full of fight. They passed, and before the foaming of their swift passage had ceased the main body, spread over a space of thirty miles, came following on, the roar of their multitudinous march sounding like the voice of many waters.

Suddenly the advance guard, with stately elevation of the broad fans of their flukes, disappeared, and by one impulse the main body followed them. Down into the depths they bore, noting with dignified wonder the absence of all the usual inhabitants of the deep until, with a thrill of joyful anticipation which set all their masses of muscle a-quiver, they recognised the scent of the prey. No thought of organized resistance presented itself, without a halt or even the faintest slackening of their great rush they plunged forward into the abysmal gloom, down, down withal into that wilderness of waiting demons. And so, in darkness and silence like that of the beginning of things, this great battle was joined. Whale after whale succumbed, anchored to the bottom by such bewildering entanglements, such enlacement of tentacles that their vast strength was helpless to free them, their jaws were bound hard together, and even the wide sweep of their flukes gat no hold upon the slimy water. But the decapods were in evil case. Assailed from above while their groping arms writhed about below they found themselves more often locked in unreleasable hold of their fellows than they did of their enemies. And the quick-shearing jaws of those foes shredded them into fragments, made nought of their bulk, revelled and frolicked among them, slaying, devouring, exulting. Again and again the triumphant mammals drew off for air and from satiety, went and lolled upon the sleek, oily surface in water now so thick that the fiercest hurricane that ever blew would have failed to raise a wave thereon.

So through a day and a night the slaying ceased not, except for these brief interludes, until those of the decapods left alive had disentangled themselves from the *débris* of their late associates and returned with what speed they might to depths and crannies where they fondly hoped their ravenous enemies could never come. Henceforth they were no longer lords of the sea, instead of being as hitherto devourers of all things living that crossed the radius of their outspread toils, they were now and for all time to be the prey of a nobler creation, a higher order of being, and at last they had taken their rightful position as creatures of usefulness in the vast economy of Creation.

A HARD man was Ralph Strang, seventh Earl of Beden, seventy years of age on his last birthday, but still upright as a dart, with hair white as snow, but with the devilry of youth still sparkling in his keen dark eyes. He was, indeed, able to follow the hounds with the best of us, and there were few men, even among the youngest and most hot-headed of our riders, who cared to follow him over all the jumps he put his horse at.

When I first came to Upstanway as a doctor I thought it strange that so good a sportsman should be so unpopular. As a rule a man can do pretty well anything in a sporting county so long as he rides straight to hounds. But before I had been in the place a month I attended him after a fall in the hunting-field, and I saw that a man like that would be unpopular even if he gave all his goods to the poor and lived the life of St. Francis of Assisi. Not that he was harsh or even unpleasant, but he had the knack of making one feel foolish and uncomfortable, and there was something in the expression of his eyes that made one unable to look him squarely in the face. His manners, indeed, were perfect, and he retained all the old-world courtliness which seems to have been permanently abandoned by this generation, but I could not help feeling that underneath all his politeness and even hospitality lay a solid substratum of contempt.

It was doubtless this impression which had earned him his unpopularity, for I never heard a single one of his enemies lay anything definite to his charge beyond the fact that his elder brother had died in a lunatic asylum, and that Lord Beden was in some vague way held responsible for this unfortunate event.

But it was not until Lord Beden purchased a 12-h.p. "Napier" motor-car that the villagers really began to consider him possessed of a devil. And certainly his spirit of devilry seemed to have found a worthy plaything in that grey mass of snorting machinery, which went through the lanes like a whirlwind, enveloped in a cloud of dust, and scattering every living thing close back against the hedges as a steamer dashes the waves against the banks of a river. I had often heard people whisper that he bore a charmed life in the hunting-field, and that another and better man would have been killed years ago, and he certainly carried the same spirit of dash and foolhardiness, and also the same good fortune, into a still more dangerous pursuit.

It was the purchase of this car that brought me into closer contact with him. I had had some experience of motors, and he was sufficiently humble to take some instructions from me, and also to let me accompany him on several occasions. At first I drove the car myself, and tried to inculcate a certain amount of caution by example, but after the

third lesson he knew as much about it as I did, and, resigning the steering-gear into his hands, I took my place by his side with some misgivings

I must confess that he handled it splendidly The man had a wonderful nerve, and when an inch to one side or the other would probably have meant death his keen eye never made a mistake and his hand on the wheel was as steady as a rock. This inspired confidence, and though the strain on my nerves was considerable, I found after a time a certain pleasurable excitement in these rides And it was excitement, I can tell you. No twelve miles an hour for Lord Beden, no precautionary brakes down hill, no wide curves for corners He rode, as he did to hounds, straight and fast. Sometimes we had six inches to spare, but never more, and as often as not another half inch would have shot us both out of the car. We always seemed to come round a sharp corner on two wheels. It was certainly exhilarating. But there was something about it I did not quite like I don't think I was physically afraid, but I recalled certain stories about Lord Beden's mad exploits in the hunting field, and it almost seemed to me as though he might be purposely riding for a fall

Then all at once my invitations to ride with him ceased. I thought at first that I had offended him, but I could think of no possible cause of offence, and, besides, his manner towards me had not changed in any way, and I dined with him more than once at Beden Hall, where he was as courteous and irritating as usual However, he offered no explanation, and I certainly did not intend to ask for one I watched him narrowly when we talked about the motor, but he made no mystery about his rides. I noticed, however, that he looked older and more careworn, and that his dark eyes burned now with an almost unnatural brilliancy

I met him two or three times on the road when I was going my rounds in the trap, and he appeared to be driving his machine more furiously and fearlessly than ever I was almost glad that his invitations had ceased Strangely enough, I always encountered him on the same road, one which led straight to Oxminster, a town about twenty miles away

One evening, however, late in August, while I was finishing my dinner in solitude, I heard a familiar hum and rattle along the road in the distance In less than a minute I saw the flash of bright lamps through my open window and heard the jar of a brake

Then there was a ring at the bell and Lord Beden was announced.

"Good evening, Scott," he said, taking off his glasses "Lovely night, isn't it? Would you care to come for a ride?" He looked very pale, and was covered with dust from head to foot.

"A ride, Lord Beden?" I replied, thoughtfully. "Well, I hardly know what to say. Will you have some coffee and a cigar?"

He nodded assent and sat down I poured him out some coffee, and noticed that his hand shook as he raised the cup to his lips But driving a motor-car at a rapid rate might easily produce this effect. Then I handed him a cigar and lit one myself

"Rather late for a ride, isn't it?" I said, after a slight pause.

"Not a bit, not a bit," he answered, hastily "It is as bright as day and the roads clear of traffic. Come, it will do you good. We can finish our cigars in the car"

"Yes," I replied, thoughtfully, "or at any rate the draught will finish them for us"

"Look here, Scott," he continued, in a lower voice, leaning over the table and looking me straight in the eyes, "I particularly want you to come In fact, you *must* come —to oblige me I want you to see something which I have seen I am a little doubtful of its actual existence"

I looked at him sharply. His voice was cold and quiet, but his eyes were certainly a bit too bright. I should say that he was in a state of intense excitement, yet with all his nerves well under control I laughed a little uneasily.

"Very well, Lord Beden," I replied, rising from my chair. "I will come But you will excuse me saying that you don't look well to-night I think you are rather over doing this motor business It shakes the system up a good deal, you know"

"I am not well, Scott," he said "But you cannot cure me"

I said no more, and left the room to put on my glasses and an overcoat

We set off through the village at about ten miles an hour. It was a glorious night and the moon shone clear in the sky, but I noticed a bank of heavy black clouds in the west, and thought it not unlikely that we should have a thunderstorm The atmosphere had been suffocating all day, and it was only the motion of the car that created the cool and pleasant breeze which blew against our faces.

When we came to the church we turned sharp to the right on to the Oxminster Road

"WOULD YOU CARE TO COME FOR A RIDE?"

It ran in a perfectly straight white line for three miles, then it began to wind and ascend the Oxbourne Hills, finally disappearing in the darkness of some woods which extend for nearly five miles over the summit in the direction of Oxminster.

"Where are we going to?" I asked, settling myself firmly in my seat.

"Oxminster," he replied, rather curtly. "Please keep your eyes open and tell me if you see anything on the road."

As he spoke he pulled the lever farther towards him and the great machine shot forward with a sudden plunge which would have unseated me if I had not been prepared for something of the sort. We quickly gathered up speed: hedges and trees went past us like a flash, the dust whirled up into the moonlight like a silver cloud, and before five minutes had elapsed we were at the foot of the hills and were tearing up the slope at almost the same terrific pace.

As we ascended the foliage began to thicken and close in upon us on either side, then the moon disappeared, and only our powerful lamps illuminated the darkness ahead of us. The car was a magnificent hill-climber, but the gradient soon became so steep that the pace slackened down to about eight miles an hour. Lord Beden had not spoken a word since he told me where we were going to, but he had kept his eyes steadily fixed on the broad circle of light in front of the car. I began to find the silence and darkness oppressive, and, to say the truth, was not quite comfortable in my own mind about my companion's sanity. I took off my glasses and tried to pierce the darkness on either side. The moon filtered through the trees and made strange shadows in the depths of the woods, but there was nothing else to be seen, and ahead of us there was only a white streak of road disappearing into blackness. Then suddenly my companion let go of the steering-gear with one hand and clutched me by the arm.

"Listen, Scott!" he cried, "do you hear it?"

I listened attentively, and at first heard nothing but the throb of the motor and a faint rustling among the trees as a slight breeze began to stir through the wood. Then I noticed that the beat of the piston was not quite the same as usual. It sounded jerky and irregular, faint and loud alternately, and I had an idea that it had considerably quickened in speed.

"I hear nothing, Lord Beden," I replied, "except that the engine sounds a little erratic. It ought not to make so much fuss over this hill."

"If you listen more carefully," he said, "you will understand. That sound is the beat of two pistons, and one of them is some way off."

I listened again. He was right. There was certainly another engine throbbing in the distance.

"I cannot see any lights," I answered, looking first in front of us and then into the darkness behind. "But it's another motor, I suppose. It does not appear to me to be anything out of the way."

He did not reply, but replaced his hand on the steering-gear and peered anxiously ahead. I began to feel a bit worried about him. It

was strange that he should get so excited about the presence of another motor-car in the neighbourhood. I was not reassured either when, in re-arranging the rug about my legs, I touched something hard in his pocket. I passed my fingers lightly over it, and had no doubt whatever that it was a revolver. I began to be sorry I had come. A revolver is not a necessary tool for the proper running of a motor-car.

We were nearly at the top of the hill now, and still in the shadow of the trees. The road here runs for more than a mile along the summit before it begins to descend, and half-way along the level another road crosses it at right angles, leading one way down a steep slope to Little Stanway, and the other along the top of the Oxbourne Hills to Kelston and Rutherton, two small villages some miles away on the edge of the moors.

We had scarcely reached the level when a few heavy drops of rain began to fall, and, looking up, I saw that the moon was no longer visible through the branches overhead. A minute later there was a low roll of thunder in the distance, and for an instant the scenery ahead of us flashed bright and faded into darkness. I turned up the collar of my coat.

The car was now moving almost at full speed, but to my surprise, before we had gone a quarter of a mile, Lord Beden slowed it down and finally brought it to a full stop with the brake. Then he appeared to be listening attentively for something, but the rising wind and pouring rain had begun to make an incessant noise among the trees, and the thunder had become more loud and continuous. I strained my sense of hearing to the utmost, but I could hear nothing beyond the sounds of the elements.

"What is the matter?" I queried, impatiently. "Are we going to stop here?"

"Yes," he replied, curtly. "That is to say, if you have no objection. There is a certain amount of shelter."

I drew a cigar from my pocket and, after several attempts, managed to light it. To say the truth, I was in hopes that we should go no farther. The downward descent, three-quarters of a mile ahead of us, was about one in ten, and I did not feel much inclined to let my companion take me down a hill of that sort.

Then, for a few seconds, the rustling of the wind and pattering of the rain ceased among the trees, and once more I could distinctly hear the thud, thud, thud of an engine. It might have been a motor-car, but it certainly sounded to me more like the noise a traction engine would make. As we listened the sound came nearer and nearer and appeared to be on our left, still some distance down the hill. Then the storm broke out again with fresh fury, and we could hear nothing else. Lord Beden pulled the lever towards him and we ran slowly forward until we were within thirty yards of the cross-roads, when he again brought the machine to a standstill.

The noise had become much louder now, and was even audible above the roar of the wind and rain. It certainly came from somewhere on our left. I looked down through the trees, and thought I saw a faint red glow some way down the hill. Lord Beden saw it too, and pointed to it with a trembling hand.

"Looks like a fire in the wood," I said, carelessly. I did not very much care what it was.

"Don't be a fool," he replied, sharply. "Can't you see it's moving?"

Yes, he was right. It was certainly moving, and in a few seconds it was hidden by a thicker mass of foliage. I did not, however, see anything very noticeable about it. It was evidently coming up the road to our left, and was probably a belated traction engine returning home from the reaping. I was more than ever convinced of my companion's insanity and wished that I was safe at home. I had half a mind to get off the car and walk, but he had by now managed to infect me with some of his own fear and excitement, and I did not quite fancy being left with no swifter mode of progression than my feet.

The thumping sound came nearer and nearer, and, as we heard it more distinctly, was even more suggestive of a traction engine. Then I saw a red light through the trees like the glow of a furnace, and not more than fifty yards away from us. My companion laid his left hand on the lever and stared intently at the corner.

Then a rather peculiar thing happened. Whatever it was that had been lumbering slowly up the hill like a gigantic snail suddenly shot across the road in front of us like a streak of smoke and flame, and through the trees to our right I could see the red glow spinning up the road to Kelston at over thirty miles an hour. Almost simultaneously Lord Beden pulled down the lever and I instinctively clutched the seat with both hands. We shot forward, took the corner with about an inch to spare between us and

"IT SUDDENLY SHOT ACROSS THE ROAD IN FRONT OF US."

the ditch, and dashed off along the road in hot pursuit. But the red glow had got at least a quarter of a mile's start, and I could not see what it proceeded from. A flash of lightning, however, showed a dark mass flying before us in a cloud of smoke. It looked something like a large waggon with a chimney sticking out of it, and sparks streamed out of the back of it until they looked like the tail of a comet.

"What the deuce is it?" I said.

"You'll see when we come up to it," the Earl answered, between his teeth. "We shall go faster in a few minutes."

We were, however, going quite fast enough for me, and though I have ridden on many motors since, and occasionally at a greater speed, I shall never forget that ride along the Kelston Road. The powerful machine beneath us trembled as though it were going to fall to pieces, the rain lashed our faces like the thongs of a whip, the thunder almost deafened us, the lightning first blinded us with its flashes and then left us in more confusing darkness, and, to crown all, a dense volume of smoke poured from the machine in front and hid the light of our own lamps. It would be hard to imagine worse conditions for a motor ride, and a man who could keep a steady hand on the steering-gear under circumstances like these was a man indeed. I should not have cared to try it, even in the daytime. But Lord Beden's luck was with him still, and we moved as though guided by some unseen hand.

"You will find a small lever by your side, Scott," he said, after a long pause. "Pull it towards you until it gives a click. It is an invention of my own." I found the handle and, following out his instructions, saw the arc of light from our lamps shoot another fifty yards ahead, leaving the ground immediately in front of the car in darkness. We had gained considerably. The light just impinged on the streaming tail of sparks.

"At last!" my companion muttered. "He has always had half a mile's start before, and the oil has given out before I could catch him. But he cannot escape us now."

"What is it, Lord Beden?"

"I am glad you see it," he replied. "I thought before to-night that it was a fancy of my brain."

"Of course I see it," I said, sharply. "I am not blind. But what is it?"

He did not answer, but a flash of lightning showed me his face, and I did not repeat the question.

Mile after mile we spun along the lonely country road, but never gaining another inch. We dashed through Kelston like a streak of light. It was fortunate that all the inhabitants were in bed. Then we shot out on to a road leading across the open moor, which stretches from here to the sea, twenty

miles away, and I remembered that eight miles from Kelston there was a deep descent into the valley of the Stour, and it was scarcely possible that we could escape destruction. I quickly made up my mind to overpower Lord Beden and gain control of the machine.

Then we suddenly began to sweep down a long and gentle gradient, and second after second our speed increased until the arc of light shone on the machine ahead of us, and I could see what manner of thing it was that we pursued.

It was, I suppose, a kind of motor car, but unlike anything I had ever seen before, and bearing no more resemblance to a modern machine than a bone shaker of twenty years ago does to the modern "free wheel." It appeared to be built of iron, and was painted a dead black. In the fore-part of the structure a 5ft. fly wheel spun round at a terrific speed, and various bars and beams moved rapidly backwards and forwards. The chimney was quite 10ft in height, and poured out a dense volume of smoke. On a small platform behind, railed in by a stout iron rail, stood a tall man with his back to us. His dark hair, which must have reached nearly to his shoulders, streamed behind him in the wind. In each hand he grasped a huge lever, and he was apparently gazing steadily into the darkness before him, though it seemed to me that he might just as well have shut his eyes, for the machine had no lamps, and the only light in the whole concern streamed out from the half-open furnace door.

Then, to my amazement, I saw the man take his hands off the levers and coolly proceed to shovel coal into the roaring fire. I held my breath, expecting to see the flying mass of iron shoot off the side of the road and turn head over heels down the sloping grass. But nothing happened. The machine apparently required no guidance, and proceeded on its way as smoothly and swiftly as before.

I took hold of my companion's arm and called his attention to this somewhat strange circumstance. He only laughed.

"Look at the smoke," he cried. "That is rather strange too." I looked up and saw it pouring over our heads in a long straight cloud, but I did not notice anything odd about it, and I said so.

"Can you smell it?" he continued. I sniffed, and noticed for the first time that there had been no smell of smoke at all, though in the earlier part of the journey we had been half blinded with it. I began to feel uncomfortable. There was certainly something unusual about the machine in front of us, and I came to the conclusion that we had had about enough of this kind of sport.

"I think we will go back, Lord Beden," I remarked, pleasantly, moving one hand towards the lever.

"You will go back to perdition, Scott," he answered, quietly. "If you meddle with me we shall be smashed to pieces. We are going forty miles an hour, and if you distract my attention for a single instant I won't answer for the consequences."

I felt the truth of what he said, and put my hand ostentatiously in my pocket. It was quite evident that I couldn't interfere with him, and equally evident that if we went on as we were going now we should be dashed to pieces. My only hope was that we should speedily accomplish whatever mad purpose Lord Beden had in his mind, although by now I began to think that he had no other object than suicide. The valley of the Stour was only two miles off.

But we had been gaining inch by inch down the slope, and were now not more than thirty yards from the machine in front of us. Showers of sparks whirled into our faces, and I kept one arm before my eyes. I soon found, however, that, for some reason or other, the sparks did not burn my skin, and I was able to resume a more comfortable position and study the occupant of the car.

His figure somehow seemed strangely familiar to me, and I tried hard to recollect where I had seen those square shoulders and long, lean limbs before. I wished I could see the man's face, for I was quite certain that I should recognise it. But he never looked back, and appeared to be absolutely unconscious of our presence so close behind him.

Nearer we crept, and still nearer, until our front wheels were not more than 10ft from the platform. The glow of the furnace bathed my companion's face in crimson light, and the figure of the man in front of us stood out like a black demon toiling at the eternal fires.

"Be careful, Lord Beden," I cried. "We shall be into it."

He turned to me with a smile of triumph, and I thought I saw the light of madness in his eyes.

"Do you know what I am going to do?" he said, in a low voice, putting his lips close to my ear. "I am going to break it to bits. We have a little speed in hand yet, and when we get to the slope of the Stour Valley I shall break the cursed thing to bits."

"For Heaven's sake," I cried, "put the brake on, Lord Beden. Are you mad?" and I gripped him by the arm. He shook my hand off, and I clung to my seat with every muscle of my body strained to the utmost, for as I spoke there was a flash of lightning, and I saw the road dipping, dipping, dipping, and far below the gleam of water among dark trees, and on the height above a large building with many spires and towers. I idly called to mind that it was the Rockshire County Asylum.

Our speed quickened horribly, and the car began to sway from side to side. I saw my companion pull the lever an inch nearer to him and grip the steering wheel with both hands. Then suddenly the road seemed to fall away beneath us; we sprang off the ground and dropped downward and forward like a stone flung from a precipice. We were going to smash clean through the machine in front of us.

"WE SPRANG OFF THE GROUND AND DROPPED DOWNWARD AND FORWARD."

For five seconds I held my breath, only awaiting the awful crash of splintering wood and iron and the shock that would fling us fifty feet from our seats. But we only touched the ground with a sickening thud an inch behind the other machine, and then a wonderful thing happened. We began to slowly pierce the rail and platform in front of us, until the man seemed to be almost touching our feet, and at last I saw his face—a wild, dark face with madness in the eyes, and the face of Lord Beden, as I had seen a portrait of him in Beden Hall taken thirty years ago.

My companion rose on his seat and grappled with his own likeness, but he seemed to be only clutching the air, and neither car nor occupant appeared to have any tangible substance. Steadily and silently we bored our way clean through the machine, inch by inch, foot by foot, through the blazing furnace, through the framework of the boiler, through bolt and bar and stanchion, through whirring fly-wheel and pulsing shaft and piston, until there was nothing beyond us but the dip of the white road, and, looking back, I saw the whole dark mass running behind our back wheels.

Lord Beden was still standing and tearing at the air with his fingers. Our car was running without guidance, and I sprang to the steering wheel and reversed the lever, but it was too late. We struck something at the side of the road and the whole machine made a leap from the ground. There was a rush of air, an awful shock and crash, and then—darkness!

A week afterwards in the hospital they told

"STEADILY AND SILENTLY WE SORED OUR WAY CLEAN THROUGH THE MACHINE"

me Lord Beden was dead. He had fallen on a large piece of scrap-iron by the road-side, and nearly every bone in his body had been broken. I myself had had a miraculous escape by falling into a thick clump of gorse, and had got off with a broken arm and dislocated collar-bone, but I was not able to get about for two months. I said nothing of what had happened, and the accident required but little explanation. Motor-car accidents are common enough, especially on slopes like that of the Stour Valley.

When I was able to get about, however, I visited the scene of the disaster. A friend of mine, one of the doctors at the County Lunatic Asylum, called for me and drove me over to the place. The smash had occurred nearly half-way down the hillside, close to a ruined shed. The ground was covered with gorse and bracken, but here and there huge pieces of rusty iron were scattered about. Some of them were sharp and brown and ugly, but many were overgrown with creeping convolvulus. They looked as if they had once been parts of some great machine.

"A curious coincidence," said my companion, as we drove away from the place.

"What do you mean?"

"I have been told," he continued, "that thirty years ago this old shed was used by the late Earl's elder brother. He was a mechanical genius, and they say that his efforts to work out some particular invention in a practical form drove him off his head. He was allowed to have this place as a workshop, and, under the supervision of two keepers, worked on his invention till the day of his death. It was thought that perhaps he would recover his reason if he ever accomplished the task. But in some mysterious way his plans were stolen from him no fewer than three times, and after the third time the poor fellow lost heart and destroyed himself. I have heard it whispered by one of my colleagues up yonder that the late Earl was not altogether ignorant of these thefts, but this is probably only gossip. All the fragments of iron you saw lying about were parts of the machine. Heaven knows what it was."

I did not venture any suggestion on this point, but I think I could have done so.

The Man Who Disappeared

By L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace.

I AM a lawyer by profession, and have a snug set of chambers in Chancery Lane. My name is Charles Pleydell. I have many clients, and can already pronounce myself a rich man.

On a certain morning towards the end of September in the year 1897 I received the following letter —

Sir,—I have been asked to call on you by a mutual friend, General Cornwallis, who accompanied my step-daughter and myself on board the *Osprey* to England. Availing myself of the General's introduction, I hope to call to see you or to send a representative about eleven o'clock to-day.

The General says that he thinks you can give me advice on a matter of some importance.

I am a Spanish lady. My home is in Brazil, and I know nothing of England or of English ways. I wish, however, to take a house near London and to settle down. This house must be situated in the neighbourhood of a large moor or common. It must have grounds surrounding it, and must have extensive cellars or basements, as my wish is to furnish a laboratory in order to carry on scientific research. I am willing to pay any sum in reason for a desirable habitation, but one thing is essential: the house must be as near London as is possible under the above conditions.—Yours obediently, Stella Scaiffe.

This letter was dated from the Carlton Hotel.

Now, it so happened that a client of mine had asked me a few months before to try and let his house—an old fashioned and somewhat gruesome mansion, situated on a lonely part of Hampstead Heath. It occurred to me that this house would exactly suit the lady whose letter I had just read.

At eleven o'clock one of my clerks brought me in a card. On it were written the words, "Miss Muriel Scaiffe." I desired the man to show the lady in, and a moment later a slight, fair-haired English girl entered the room.

"Mrs. Scaiffe is not quite well and has sent me in her stead. You have received a letter from my step-mother, have you not, Mr. Pleydell?"

"I have," I replied. "Will you sit down, Miss Scaiffe?"

She did so. I looked at her attentively. She was young and pretty. She also looked good, and although there was a certain anxiety about her face which she could not quite repress, her smile was very sweet.

"Your step-mother," I said, "requires a house with somewhat peculiar conditions?"

"Oh, yes," the girl answered. "She is very anxious on the subject. We want to be settled within a week."

"That is a very short time in which to take and furnish a house," I could not help remarking.

"Yes," she said, again. "But, all the same, in our case it is essential. My step-mother says that anything can be done if there is enough money."

"That is true in a sense," I replied, smilingly. "If I can help you I shall be pleased. You want a house on a common?"

"On a common or moor."

"It so happens, Miss Scaiffe, that there is a place called The Rosary at Hampstead which may suit you. Here are the particulars. Read them over for yourself and tell me if there is any use in my giving you an order to view."

She read the description eagerly, then she said —

"I am sure Mrs. Scaiffe would like to see this house. When can we go?"

"To day, if you like, and if you particularly wish it I can meet you at The Rosary at three o'clock."

"That will do nicely," she answered.

Soon afterwards she left me.

The rest of the morning passed as usual, and at the appointed hour I presented myself at the gates of The Rosary. A carriage was already drawn up there, and as I approached a tall lady with very dark eyes stepped out of it.

A glance showed me that the young lady had not accompanied her.

"You are Mr Pleydell?" she said, holding out her hand to me, and speaking in excellent English.

"Yes," I answered.

"You saw my step-daughter this morning?"

"Yes," I said again.

"I have called to see the house," she continued. "Muriel tells me that it is likely to suit my requirements. Will you show it to me?"

I opened the gates, and we entered a wide carriage-drive. The Rosary had been unlet for some months, and weeds partly covered the avenue. The grounds had a desolate and gloomy appearance, leaves were falling thickly from the trees, and altogether the entire place looked undesirable and neglected.

The Spanish lady, however, seemed delighted with everything. She looked around her with sparkling glances. Flashing her dark eyes into my face, she praised the trees and avenue, the house, and all that the house contained.

She remarked that the rooms were spacious, the lobbies wide, above all things, the cellars numerous.

"I am particular about the cellars, Mr. Pleydell," she said.

"Indeed!" I answered. "At all events, there are plenty of them."

"Oh, yes! And this one is so large. It will quite suit our purpose. We will turn it into a laboratory.

"My brother and I—— Oh, I have not told you about my brother. He is a Spaniard—Señor Metello—he joins us here next week. He and I are scientists, and I hope scientists of no mean order. We have come to England for the purpose of experimenting. In this land of the free we can do what we please. We feel, Mr Pleydell—you look so sympathizing that I cannot help confiding in you—we feel that we are on the verge of a very great—a very astounding discovery, at which the world, yes, the whole world will wonder. This house is the one of all others for our purpose. When can we take possession, Mr Pleydell?"

I asked several questions, which were all answered to my satisfaction, and finally returned to town, prepared to draw up a lease by which the house and grounds known as The Rosary, Hampstead Heath, were to be handed over at a very high rent to Mrs. Scaiffe.

"THE SPANISH LADY SEEMED DELIGHTED WITH EVERYTHING."

I felt pleased at the good stroke of business which I had done for a client, and had no apprehensions of any sort. Little did I guess what that afternoon's work would mean to me, and still more to one whom I had ever been proud to call my greatest friend.

Everything went off without a hitch. The Rosary passed into the hands of Mrs. Scaiffe, and also into the hands of her brother, Señor Merello, a tall, dark, very handsome man, bearing all over him the well-known characteristics of a Spanish don.

A week or two went by and the affair had well-nigh passed my memory, when one afternoon I heard eager, excited words in my clerks' room, and the next moment my head clerk entered, followed by the fair-haired English-looking girl who had called herself Muriel Scaiffe.

"I want to speak to you, Mr Pleydell," she said, in great agitation. "Can I see you alone, and at once?"

"Certainly," I answered. I motioned to the clerk to leave us and helped the young lady to a chair.

"I cannot stay a moment," she began. "Even now I am followed. Mr Pleydell, he has told me that he knows you; it was on that account I persuaded my step-mother to come to you about a house. You are his greatest friend, for he has said it."

"Of whom are you talking?" I asked, in a bewildered tone.

"Of Oscar Digby!" she replied. "The great traveller, the great discoverer, the greatest, most single-minded, the grandest man of his age. You know him? Yes—yes."

She paused for breath. Her eyes were full of tears.

"Indeed, I do know him," I answered. "He is my very oldest friend. Where is he? What is he doing? Tell me all about him."

She had risen. Her hands were clasped tightly together, her face was white as death.

"He is on his way to England," she answered. "Even now he may have landed. He brings great news, and the moment he sets foot in London he is in danger."

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot tell you what I mean. I dare not. He is your friend, and it is your province to save him."

"But from what, Miss Scaiffe? You have no right to come here and make ambiguous statements. If you come to me at all you ought to be more explicit."

She trembled and now, as though she could not stand any longer, dropped into a chair.

"I am not brave enough to explain things more fully," she said. "I can only repeat my words, 'Your friend is in danger.' Tell him—if you can, if you will—to have nothing to do with *us*. Keep him, at all risks, away from *us*. If he mentions us pretend that you do not know anything about us. I would not speak like this if I had not cause—the gravest. When we took The Rosary I did not believe that matters were so awful, indeed, then I was unaware that Mr Digby was returning to London. But last night I overheard . . . . Oh! Mr Pleydell, I can tell you no more. Pity me and do not question me. Keep Oscar Digby away from The Rosary and, if possible, do not betray me, but if in no other way you can insure his leaving us alone, tell him that I—yes, I, Muriel Scaiffe—wish it. There, I cannot do more."

She was trembling more terribly than ever. She took out her handkerchief to wipe the moisture from her brow.

"I must fly," she said. "If this visit is discovered my life is worth very little."

After she had gone I sat in absolute amazement. My first sensation was that the girl must be mad. Her pallor, her trembling, her vague innuendoes pointed surely to a condition of nerves the reverse of sane. But although the madness of Muriel Scaiffe seemed the most possible solution of her strange visit, I could not cast the thing from my memory. I felt almost needlessly disturbed by it. All day her extraordinary words haunted me, and when, on the next day, Digby, whom I had not seen for years, unexpectedly called, I remembered Miss Scaiffe's visit with a queer and ever-increasing sense of apprehension.

Digby had been away from London for several years. Before he went he and I had shared the same rooms, had gone about together, and had been chums in the fullest sense of the word. It was delightful to see him once again. His hearty, loud laugh fell refreshingly on my ears, and one or two glances into his face removed my fears. After all, it was impossible to associate danger with one so big, so burly, with such immense physical strength. His broad forehead, his keen, frank blue eyes, his smiling mouth, his strong and muscular hands, all denoted strength of mind and body. He looked as if he were muscle all over.

"Well," he said, "here I am, and I have a good deal to tell you. I want your help also, old man. It is your business to introduce me to the most promising and most

enterprising financier of the day. I have it in my power, Pleydell, to make his fortune, and yours, and my own, and half-a-dozen other people's as well."

"Tell me all about it," I said. I sat back in my chair, prepared to enjoy myself.

Oscar was a very noted traveller and thought much of by the Geographical Society.

"I WANT YOUR HELP ALSO, OLD MAN."

He came nearer to me and dropped his voice a trifle.

"I have made an amazing discovery," he said, "and that is one reason why I have hurried back to London. I do not know whether you are sufficiently conversant with extraordinary and out-of-the-way places on our globe. But anyhow, I may as well tell you that there is a wonderful region, as yet very little known, which lies on the watershed of the Essequibo and Amazon rivers. In that region are situated the old Montes de Cristæs or Crystal Mountains, the disputed boundary between British Guiana and Brazil. There also, according to the legend, was supposed to be the wonderful lost city of Manoa. Many expeditions were sent out to discover it in the seventeenth century, and it was the Eldorado of Sir Walter Raleigh's famous expedition in 1615, the failure of which cost him his head."

I could not help laughing.

"This sounds like an old geography lesson. What have you to do with this *terra incognita*?"

He leant forward and dropped his voice.

"Do not think me mad," he said, "for I speak in all sanity. I have found the lost Eldorado!"

"Nonsense!" I cried.

"It is true. I do not mean to say that I have found the mythical city of gold, that, of course, does not exist. But what I have discovered is a spot close to Lake Amacu that is simply laden with gold. The estimates computed on my specimens and reports make it out to be the richest place in the world. The whole thing is, as yet, a close secret, and I have come to London now to put it into the hands of a big financier. A company must be formed with a capital of something like ten millions to work it."

"By Jove!" I cried. "You astonish me."

"The thing will create an enormous sensation," he went on, "and I shall be a millionaire; that is, if the secret does not leak out."

"The secret," I cried.

"Yes, the secret of its exact locality."

"Have you charts?"

"Yes, but those I would rather not disclose, even to you, old man, just yet."

I was silent for a moment, then I said —

"Horace Lancaster is the biggest financier in the whole of London. He is undoubtedly your man. If you can satisfy him with your reports, charts, and specimens he can float the company. You must see him, Digby."

"Yes, that is what I want," he cried.

"I will telephone to his office at once."

I rang the bell for my clerk and gave him directions.

He left the room. In a few moments he returned with the information that Lancaster was in Paris.

"He won't be back for a week, sir," said the clerk.

He left the room, and I looked at Digby.

"Are you prepared to wait?" I asked.

He shrugged his great shoulders.

"I must, I suppose," he said "But it is provoking. At any moment another may forestall me. Not that it is likely; but there is always the possibility. Shall we talk over matters to-night, Pleydell? Will you dine with me at my club?"

"With a heart and a half," I answered

"By the way," continued Digby, "some friends of mine—Brazilians—ought to be in London now: a lady of the name of Scaiffe, with her pretty little step-daughter, an English girl. I should like to introduce you to them. They are remarkably nice people. I had a letter from Mrs. Scaiffe just as I was leaving Brazil telling me that they were *en route* for England and asking me to look her up in town. I wonder where they are? Her brother, too, Senor Merello, is a most charming man. Why, Pleydell, what is the matter?"

I was silent for a moment, then I said "If I were you I would have nothing to do with these people. I happen to know their whereabouts, and——"

"Well?" he said, opening his eyes in amazement.

"The little girl does not want you to call on them, Digby. Take her advice. She looked true and good." To my astonishment I saw that the big fellow seemed quite upset at my remarks

"True!" he said, beginning to pace the room. "Of course the little thing is true. I tell you, Pleydell, I am fond of her. Not engaged, or anything of that sort, but I like her. I was looking forward to meeting them. The mother—the step mother, I mean—is a magnificent woman. I am great friends with her. I was staying at their Quinta last winter. I also know the brother, Señor Merello. Has little Muriel lost her head?"

"She is anxious and frightened. The whole thing seems absurd, of course, but she certainly did beg of me to keep you away from her step-mother, and I half promised to respect her secret and not to tell you the name of the locality where Mrs. Scaiffe and Señor Merello are at present living."

He tried not to look annoyed, but he evidently was so. A few moments later he left me.

That evening Digby and I dined together. We afterwards went exhaustively into the great subject of his discovery. He showed me his specimens and reports, and, in short, so completely fired my enthusiasm that I was all impatience for Lancaster's return. The thing was a big thing, one worth fighting for. We said no more about Mrs. Scaiffe, and I hoped that my friend would not fall into the hands of a woman who, I began to fear, was little better than an adventuress.

Three or four days passed. Lancaster was still detained in Paris, and Digby was evidently eating his heart out with impatience at the unavoidable delay in getting his great scheme floated.

One afternoon he burst noisily into my presence.

"Well," he cried. "The little girl has discovered herself. Talk of women and their pranks! She came to see me at my hotel. She declared that she could not keep away. I just took the little thing in my arms and hugged her. We are going to have a honeymoon when the company is floated, and this evening, Pleydell, I dine at The Rosary.

"I JUST TOOK THE LITTLE THING IN MY ARMS AND HUGGED HER."

Ha! ha! my friend. I know all about the secret retreat of the Scaiffes by this time. Little Muriel told me herself. I dine there to-night, and they want you to come, too."

I was about to refuse when, as if in a vision, the strange, entreating, suffering face of Muriel Scaiffe, as I had seen it the day she implored me to save my friend, rose up before my eyes. Whatever her present inexplicable conduct might mean, I would go with Digby to night.

We arrived at The Rosary between seven and eight o'clock. Mrs. Scaiffe received us in Oriental splendour. Her dress was a wonder of magnificence. Diamonds flashed in her raven black hair and glittered round her shapely neck. She was certainly one of the most splendid-looking women I had ever seen, and Digby was not many moments in her company before he was completely subjugated by her charms.

The pale little Muriel looked washed-out and insignificant beside this gorgeous creature. Señor Merello was a masculine edition of his handsome sister: his presence and his wonderful courtly grace of manner seemed but to enhance and accentuate her charms.

At dinner we were served by Spanish servants, and a repulsive-looking negro of the name of Samson stood behind Mrs. Scaiffe's chair.

She was in high spirits, drank freely of champagne, and openly alluded to the great discovery.

"You must show us the chart, my friend," she said.

"No!" he answered, in an emphatic voice. He smiled as he spoke and showed his strong, white teeth.

She bent towards him and whispered something. He glanced at Muriel, whose face was deadly white. Then he rose abruptly.

"As regards anything else, command me," he said; "but not the chart."

Mrs. Scaiffe did not press him further. The ladies went into the drawing-room, and by and by Digby and I found ourselves returning to London.

During the journey I mentioned to him that Lancaster had wired to say that he would be at his office and prepared for a meeting on Friday. This was Monday night.

"I am glad to hear that the thing will not be delayed much longer," he answered. "I may as well confess that I am devoured by impatience."

"Your mind will soon be at rest," I replied. "And now, one thing more, old man. I must talk frankly. I do not like Mrs. Scaiffe—I do not like Señor Merello. As you value all your future, keep that chart out of the hands of those people."

"Am I mad?" he questioned. "The chart is seen by no living soul until I place it in Lancaster's hands. But all the same, Pleydell," he added, "you are prejudiced, Mrs. Scaiffe is one of the best of women."

"Think her so, if you will," I replied; "but, whatever you do, keep your knowledge of your Eldorado to yourself. Remember that on Friday the whole thing will be safe in Lancaster's keeping."

He promised, and I left him.

On Tuesday I saw nothing of Digby.

On Wednesday evening, when I returned home late, I received the following letter:—

I am not mad. I have heavily bribed the kitchen-maid, the only English woman in the whole house, to post this for me. I was forced to call on Mr. Digby and to engage myself to him at any cost. I am now strictly confined to my room under pretence of illness. In reality I am quite well, but a close prisoner. Mr. Digby dined here again last night and, under the influence of a certain drug introduced into his wine, has given away the whole of his discovery *except* the exact locality.

He is to take supper here late to-morrow night (Thursday) and to bring the chart. If he does, he will never leave The Rosary alive. All is prepared. *I speak who know.* Don't betray me, but save him.

The letter fell from my hands. What did it mean? Was Digby's life in danger, or had the girl who wrote to me really gone mad? The letter was without date, without any heading, and without signature. Nevertheless, as I picked it up and read it carefully over again, I was absolutely convinced beyond a shadow of doubt of its truth. Muriel Scaiffe was not mad. She was a victim, to how great an extent I did not dare to think. Another victim, one in even greater danger, was Oscar Digby. I must save him. I must do what the unhappy girl who was a prisoner in that awful house implored of me.

It was late, nearly midnight, but I knew that I had not a moment to lose. I had a friend, a certain Dr. Garland, who had been police surgeon for the Westminster Division for several years. I went immediately to his house in Eaton Square. As I had expected, he was up, and without any preamble I told him the whole long story of the last few weeks.

Finally, I showed him the letter. He heard me without once interrupting. He read the letter without comment. When he folded it up and returned it to me I saw that his keen, clean-shaven face was full of interest. He was silent for several minutes, then he said:—

"I am glad you came to me. This story of yours may mean a very big thing. We have four *prima facie* points. *One*. Your friend has this enormously valuable secret about the place in Guiana or on its boundary, a secret which may be worth anything. *Two*. He is very intimate with Mrs. Scaiffe, her step-daughter, and her brother. The intimacy started in Brazil. *Three*. He is engaged to the step-daughter, who evidently is being used as a sort of tool, and is herself in a state of absolute terror, and, so far as one can make out, is not specially in love with Digby nor Digby with her. *Four*. Mrs. Scaiffe and her brother are determined, at any risk, to secure the chart which Digby is to hand to them to-morrow evening. The girl thinks this so important that she has practically risked her life to give you due warning. By the way, when did you say Lancaster would return? Has he made an appointment to see Digby and yourself?"

"Yes, at eleven o'clock on Friday morning."

"Doubtless Mrs. Scaiffe and her brother know of this?"

"Probably," I answered. "As far as I can make out they have such power over Digby that he confides everything to them."

"Just so. They have power over him, and they are not scrupulous as to the means they use to force his confidence. If Digby goes to The Rosary to-morrow evening the interview with Lancaster will, in all probability, never take place."

"What do you mean?" I cried, in horror.

"Why, this. Mrs. Scaiffe and Señor Merello are determined to learn Digby's secret. It is necessary for their purpose that they should know the secret and also that they should be the *sole possessors* of it. You see why they want Digby to call on them? They must get his secret from him *before* he sees Lancaster. The chances are that if he gives it up he will never leave the house alive."

"Then, what are we to do?" I asked, for Garland's meaning stunned me, and I felt incapable of thought or of any mode of action.

"Leave this matter in my hands. I am going immediately to see Inspector Frost. I will communicate with you directly anything serious occurs."

The next morning I called upon Digby and found him breakfasting at his club. He looked worried, and, when I came in, his greeting was scarcely cordial.

"What a solemn face, Pleydell!" he said. "Is anything wrong?" He motioned me to a seat near. I sank into it.

"I want you to come out of town with me," I said. "I can take a day off. Shall we both run down to Brighton? We can return in time for our interview with Lancaster to-morrow."

"It is impossible," he answered. "I should like to come with you, but I have an engagement for to-night."

"Are you going to The Rosary?" I asked.

"THEY HAVE SUCH POWER OVER DIGBY THAT HE CONFIDES EVERYTHING TO THEM."

"I am," he replied, after a moment's pause. "Why, what is the matter?" he added. "I suppose I may consider myself a free agent." There was marked irritation in his tone.

"I wish you would not go," I said.

"Why not?"

"I do not trust the people."

"Folly, Pleydell. In the old days you used not to be so prejudiced."

"I had not the same cause. Digby, if ever people are trying to get you into their hands, they are those people. Have you not already imparted your secret to them?"

"How do you know?" he exclaimed, springing up and turning crimson.

"Well, can you deny it?"

His face paled.

"I don't know that I want to," he said. "Mrs. Scaiffe and Merello will join me in this matter. There is no reason why things should be kept dark from them."

"But is this fair or honourable to Lancaster? Remember, I have already written fully to him. Do, I beg of you, be careful."

"Lancaster cannot object to possible wealthy shareholders," was Digby's answer. "Anyhow," he added, laughing uneasily, "I object to being interfered with. Pray understand that, old man, if we are to continue friends; and now by-bye for the present. We meet at eleven o'clock to-morrow at Lancaster's."

His manner gave me no pretext for remaining longer with him, and I returned to my own work. About five o'clock on that same day a telegram was handed to me which ran as follows:—

Come here at once.—GARLAND.

I left the house, hailed a hansom, and in a quarter of an hour was shown into Garland's study. He was not alone. A rather tall, grey-haired, grey-moustached, middle-aged man was with him. This man was introduced to me as Inspector Frost.

"Now, Pleydell," said Garland, in his quick, incisive way, "listen to me carefully. The time is short. Inspector Frost and I have not ceased our inquiries since you called on me last night. I must tell you that we believe the affair to be of the most serious kind. Time is too pressing now to enter into all details, but the thing amounts to this. There is the gravest suspicion that Mrs. Scaiffe and her brother, Señor Merello, are employed by a notorious gang in Brazil to force Digby to disclose the exact position of the gold mine. We also know for certain that Mrs. Scaiffe is in constant and close communication with some very suspicious people both in London and in Brazil.

"Now, listen. The crisis is to be to-night. Digby is to take supper at The Rosary, and there to give himself absolutely away. He will take his chart with him, that is the scheme. Digby must not go—that is, if we can possibly prevent him. We expect you to do what you can under the circumstances, but as the case is so serious, and as it is more than probable that Digby will not be persuaded, Inspector Frost and myself and a number of men of his division will surround the house as soon as it becomes dark, and if Digby should insist on going in every protection in case of difficulty will be given him. The presence of the police will also insure the capture of Mrs. Scaiffe and her brother."

"You mean," I said, "that you will, if necessary, search the house?"

"Yes."

"But how can you do so without a warrant?"

"We have thought of that," said Garland, with a smile. "A magistrate living at Hampstead has been already communicated with. If necessary, one of our men will ride over to his house and procure the requisite instrument to enforce our entrance."

"Very well," I answered; "then I will go at once to Digby's, but I may as well tell you plainly that I have very little hope of dissuading him."

I drove as fast as I could to my friend's rooms, but was greeted with the information that he had already left and was not expected back until late that evening. This was an unlooked for blow.

I went to his club—he was not there. I then returned to Dr. Garland.

"I failed to find him," I said. "What can be done? Is it possible that he has already gone to his fate?"

"That is scarcely likely," replied Garland, after a pause. "He was invited to supper at The Rosary, and according to your poor young friend's letter the time named was late. There is nothing for it but to waylay him on the grounds before he goes in. You will come with us to-night, will you not, Pleydell?"

"Certainly," I answered.

Garland and I dined together. At half past nine we left Eaton Square and, punctually at ten o'clock, the hansom we had taken put us down at one of the roads on the north side of the Heath. The large house which I knew so well loomed black in the moonlight.

The night was cold and fresh. The moon was in its second quarter and was shining brightly. Garland and I passed down the dimly lit lane beside the wall. A tall, dark figure loomed from the darkness and, as it came forward, I saw that it was Inspector Frost.

"Mr. Digby has not arrived yet," he said. "Perhaps, sir," he added, looking at me, "you can even now dissuade him, for it is a bad business. All my men are ready," he continued, "and at a signal the house will be surrounded; but we must have one last try to prevent his entering it. Come this way,

please, sir," he added, beckoning to me to follow him.

We passed out into the road.

"I am absolutely bewildered, inspector," I said to him. "Do you mean to say there is really great danger?"

"The worst I ever knew," was his answer. "You cannot stop a man entering a house if he wishes to; but I can tell you, Mr Pleydell, I do not believe his life is worth that if he goes in." And the inspector snapped his fingers.

He had scarcely ceased speaking when the jingling of the bells of a hansom sounded behind us. The cab drew up at the gates and Oscar Digby alighted close to us.

Inspector Frost touched him on the shoulder.

He swung round and recognised me.

"Halloa!" Pleydell," he said, in no very cordial accents. "What in the name of Heaven are you doing here? What does this mean? Who is this man?"

"I am a police-officer, Mr. Digby, and I want to speak to you. Mr. Pleydell has asked you not to go into that house. You are, of course, free to do as you like, but I must tell you that you are running into great danger. Be advised by me and go away."

For answer Digby thrust his hand into his breast-pocket. He pulled out a note which he gave me.

"Read that, Pleydell," he said, "and receive my answer." I tore the letter from its envelope and read in the moonlight —

Come to me. I am in danger and suffering. Do not fail me.—MURIEL.

"A hoax! A forgery!" I could not help crying. "For God's sake, Digby, don't be mad."

"Mad or sane, I go into that house," he said. His bright blue eyes flashed with passion and his breath came quickly.

"Hands off, sir. Don't keep me."

He swung himself away from me.

"One word," called the inspector after him. "How long do you expect to remain?"

"Perhaps an hour. I shall be home by midnight."

"And now, sir, please listen. You can be assured, in case of any trouble, that we are here, and I may further tell you that if you are not out of the house by one o'clock, we shall enter with a search warrant."

Digby stood still for a moment, then he turned to me.

"I cannot but resent your interference, but I believe you mean well. Good bye!" He

"HE SWUNG HIMSELF AWAY FROM ME."

wrung my hand and walked quickly up the drive.

We watched him ring the bell. The door was opened at once by the negro servant. Digby entered. The door closed silently. Inspector Frost gave a low whistle.

"I would not be that man for a good deal," he said.

Garland came up to us both.

"Is the house entirely surrounded, Frost?" I heard him whisper. Frost smiled, and I

saw his white teeth gleam in the darkness. He waved his hand.

"There is not a space of six feet between man and man," I heard him say, "and now we have nothing to do but to wait and hope for at least an hour and a half. If in an hour's time Mr. Digby does not reappear I shall send a man for the warrant. At one o'clock we enter the house."

Garland and I stood beneath a large fir tree in a dense shade and within the inclosed garden. The minutes seemed to crawl. Our conversation was limited to low whispers at long intervals.

Eleven o'clock chimed on the church clock near by, then half-past sounded on the night air. My ears were strained to catch the expected click of the front door-latch, but it did not come. The house remained wrapt in silence. Once Garland whispered:—

"Hark!" We listened closely. It certainly seemed to me that a dull, muffled sound, as of pounding or hammering, was just audible, but whether it came from the house or not it was impossible to tell.

At a quarter to twelve the one remaining lighted window on the first floor became suddenly dark. Still there was no sign of Digby. Midnight chimed.

Frost said a word to Garland and disappeared, treading softly. He was absent for more than half an hour. When he returned I heard him say:—

"I have got it," and he touched his pocket with his hand as he spoke.

The remaining moments went by in intense anxiety, and, just as the deep boom of one o'clock was heard the inspector laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Come along quietly," he whispered.

Some sign, conveyed by a low whistle, passed from him to his men, and I heard the bushes rustle around us.

The next moment we had ascended the steps, and we could hear the deep whirr of the front door bell as Frost pressed the button.

In less time than we had expected we heard the bolts shot back. The door was opened on a chain and a black face appeared at the slit.

"Who are you and what do you want?" said a voice.

"I have called for Mr. Digby," said Frost. "Go and tell him that his friend, Mr. Pleydell, and also Doctor Garland want to see him immediately."

A look of blank surprise came over the negro's face.

"But no one of the name of Digby lives here," he said.

"Mrs. Scaiffe lives here," replied the inspector, "and also a Spanish gentleman of the name of Señor Merello. Tell them that I wish to see them immediately, and that I am a police-officer."

A short conversation was evidently taking place within. The next moment the door was flung open, electric lights sprang into being, and my eyes fell upon Mrs. Scaiffe.

She was dressed with her usual magnificence. She came forward with a stately calm and stood silently before us. Her large black eyes were gleaming.

"Well, Mr. Pleydell," she said, speaking in

"SHE CAME FORWARD WITH A STATELY CALM."

an easy voice, "what is the reason of this midnight disturbance? I am always glad to welcome you to my house, but is not the hour a little late?"

Her words were interrupted by Inspector Frost, who held up his hand.

"Your attitude, madam," he said, "is hopeless. We have all come here with a definite object. Mr. Oscar Digby entered this house at a quarter past ten to-night. From that moment the house has been closely surrounded. He is therefore still here."

"Where is your authority for this unwarrantable intrusion?" she said. Her manner changed, her face grew hard as iron. Her whole attitude was one of insolence and defiance.

The inspector immediately produced his warrant.

She glanced over it and uttered a shrill laugh.

"Mr. Digby is not in the house," she said.

She had scarcely spoken before an adjoining door was opened, and Señor Merello, looking gaunt and very white about the face, approached. She looked up at him and smiled, then she said, carelessly:—

"Gentlemen, this is my brother, Señor Merello."

The Señor bowed slightly, but did not speak.

"Once more," said Frost, "where is Mr. Digby?"

"I repeat once more," said Mrs. Scaiffe, "that Mr. Digby is not in this house."

"But we saw him enter at a quarter past ten."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"He is not here now."

"He could not have gone, for the house has been surrounded."

Again she gave her shoulders a shrug. "You have your warrant, gentlemen," she said, "you can look for yourselves."

Frost came up to her.

"I regret to say, madam, that you, this gentleman, and all your servants must consider yourselves under arrest until we find Mr. Oscar Digby."

"That will be for ever, then," she replied, "but please yourselves."

My heart beat with an unwonted sense of terror. What could the woman mean? Digby, either dead or alive, must be in the house.

The operations which followed were conducted rapidly. The establishment, consisting of Mrs. Scaiffe, her brother, two Spanish men-servants, two maids, one of Spanish extraction, and the negro who had opened the door to us, were summoned and placed in the charge of a police-sergeant.

Muriel Scaiffe was nowhere to be seen.

Then our search of the house began. The rooms on the ground floor, consisting of the drawing-room, dining-room, and two other big rooms, were fitted up in quite an everyday manner. We did not take much time going through them.

In the basement, the large cellar which had attracted Mrs. Scaiffe's pleased surprise on the day when I took her to see The Rosary had now been fitted up as a laboratory. I gazed at it in astonishment. It was evidently intended for the manufacture of chemicals on an almost commercial scale. All the latest chemical and electrical apparatus were to be found there, as well as several large machines, the purposes of which were not evident. One in particular I specially noticed. It was a big tank with a complicated equipment for the manufacture of liquid air in large quantities.

We had no time to give many thoughts to the laboratory just then. A foreboding sense of ever-increasing fear was upon each and all of us. It was sufficient to see that Digby was not there.

Our search in the upper regions was equally unsuccessful. We were just going down stairs again when Frost drew my attention to a door which we had not yet opened. We went to it and found it locked. Putting our strength to work, Garland and I between us burst it open. Within, we found a girl crouching by the bed. She was only partly dressed, and her head was buried in her hands. We went up to her. She turned, saw my face, and suddenly clung to me.

"Have you found him? Is he safe?"

"I do not know, my dear," I answered, trying to soothe her. "We are looking for him. God grant us success."

"Did he come to the house? I have been locked in here all day and heavily drugged. I have only just recovered consciousness and scarcely know what I am doing. Is he in the house?"

"He came in. We are searching for him, we hope to find him."

"That you will never do!" She gave a piercing cry and fell unconscious on the floor.

We placed the unhappy girl on the bed. Garland produced brandy and gave her a few drops; she came to in a couple of minutes and began to moan feebly. We left her,

HE WENT UP THERE."

promising to return. We had no time to attend to her just then.

When we reached the hall Frost stood still.

"The man is not here," he muttered.

"But he is here," was Garland's incisive answer. "Inspector, you have got to tear the place to pieces."

The latter nodded.

The inspector's orders were given rapidly, and dawn was just breaking when ten policemen, ordered in from outside, began their systematic search of the entire house from roof to basement.

Pick and crowbar were ruthlessly applied, and never have I seen a house in such a mess. Floorings were torn up and rafters cut through. Broken plaster littered the rooms and lay about on the sumptuous furniture. Walls were pierced and bored through. Closets and cupboards were ransacked. The backs of the fireplaces were torn out and the chimneys explored.

Very little was said as our investigation proceeded, and room after room was checked off.

Finally, an exhaustive examination of the basement and cellars completed our search.

"Well, Dr. Garland, are you satisfied?" asked the inspector.

We had gone back to the garden, and Garland was leaning against a tree, his hands thrust in his pockets and his eyes fixed on the ground. Frost pulled his long moustache and breathed quickly.

"Are you satisfied?" he repeated.

"We must talk sense or we shall all go mad," was Garland's answer. "The thing is absurd, you know. Men don't disappear. Let us work this thing out logically. There are only three planes in space and we know matter is indestructible. If Digby left this house he went up, down, or horizontally. *Up is out of the question.* If he disappeared in a balloon or was shot off the roof he must have been seen by us, for the house was surrounded. He certainly did not pass through the cordon of men. *He did not go down*, for every cubic foot of basement and cellar has been accounted for, as well as every cubic foot of space in the house.

"So we come to the chemical change of matter, dissipation into gas by heat. There are no furnaces, no ashes, no gas cylinders, nor dynamos, nor carbon points. The time when we lost sight of him to the time of entrance was exactly two hours and three-quarters. There is no way out of it. He is still there."

"He is not there," was the quiet retort of the inspector. "I have sent for the Assistant Commissioner to Scotland Yard, and will ask him to take over the case. It is too much for me."

The tension in all our minds had now reached such a state of strain that we began to fear our own shadows.

Oscar Digby, standing, as it were, on the threshold of a very great future, the hero of a legend worthy of old romance, had suddenly and inexplicably vanished. I could not get my reason to believe that he was not still in the house, for there was not the least doubt that he had not come out. What would happen in the next few hours?

'Is there no secret chamber or secret passage that we have overlooked?" I said, turning to the inspector.

"The walls have been tapped," he replied. "There is not the slightest indication of a

hollow. There are no underground passages. The man is not within these walls."

He now spoke with a certain degree of irritation in his voice which the mystery of the case had evidently awakened in his mind. A few moments later the sound of approaching wheels caused us to turn our heads. A cab drew up at the gates, out of which alighted the well-known form of Sir George Freer.

Garland had already entered the house, and on Sir George appearing on the scene he and I followed him.

We had just advanced across the hall to the room where the members of the household, with the exception of poor Muriel Scaiffe, were still detained, when, to our utter amazement, a long, strange peal of laughter sounded from below. This was followed by another, and again by another. The laughter came from the lips of Garland. We glanced at each other. What on earth did it mean? Together we darted down the stone steps, but before we reached the laboratory another laugh rang out. All hope in me was suddenly changed to a chilling fear, for the laugh was not natural. It had a clanging, metallic sound, without any mirth.

In the centre of the room stood Garland. His mouth was twitching and his breath jerked in and out convulsively.

"What is it? What is the matter?" I cried.

He made no reply, but, pointing to a machine with steel blocks, once more broke into a choking, gurgling laugh which made my flesh creep.

"IN THE CENTRE OF THE ROOM STOOD GARLAND."

Had he gone mad? Sir George moved swiftly across to him and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Come, what is all this, Garland?" he said, sternly, though his own face was full of fear.

I knew Garland to be a man of extraordinary self-control, and I could see that he was now holding himself in with all the force at his command.

"It is no use—I cannot tell you," he burst out.

"What—you know what has become of him?"

"Yes."

"You can prove it?"

"Yes"

"Speak out, man"

"He is not here," said Garland.

"Then where is he?"

He flung his hand out towards the Heath, and I saw that the fit was taking him again, but once more he controlled himself. Then he said, in a clear, level voice:—

"He is dead, Sir George, and you can never see his body. You cannot hold an inquest, for there is nothing to hold it on. The winds have taken him and scattered him in dust on the Heath. Don't look at me like that, Pleydell. I am sane, although it is a wonder we are not all mad over this business. Look and listen."

He pointed to the great metal tank.

"I arrived at my present conclusion by a

process of elimination," he began. "Into that tank which contained liquid air Digby, gagged and bound, must have been placed violently, probably after he had given away the chart. Death would have been instantaneous, and he would have been frozen into complete solidity in something like forty minutes. The ordinary laboratory experiment is to freeze a rabbit, which can then be powdered into mortar like any other friable stone. The operation here has been the same. It is only a question of size. Remember, we are dealing with 312 deg. below zero Fahrenheit, and then—well, look at this and these."

He pointed to a large machine with steel blocks and to a bench littered with saws, chisels, pestles, and mortars.

"That machine is a stone-breaker," he said. "On the dust adhering to these blocks I found this."

He held up a test tube containing a blue liquid.

"The Guiacum test," he said. "In other words, blood. This fact taken with the facts we already know, that Digby never left the house; that the only other agent of destruction of a body, fire, is out of the question; that this tank is the receptacle of that enormous machine for making liquid air in very large quantities; and, above all, the practical possibility of the operation being conducted by the men who are at present in the house, afford me absolutely conclusive proof beyond a possibility of doubt as to what has happened. The body of that unfortunate man is as if it had never been, without a fragment of pin-point size for identification or evidence. It is beyond the annals of all the crimes that I have ever heard of. What law can help us? Can you hold an inquest on nothing? Can you charge a person with murder where no victim or trace of a victim can be produced?"

A sickly feeling came over me. Garland's words carried their own conviction, and we knew that we stood in the presence of a horror without a name. Nevertheless, to the police mind horror *per se* does not exist. To them there is always a mystery, a crime, and a solution. That is all. The men beside me were police once more. Sentiment might come later.

"Are there any reporters here?" asked Sir George.

"None," answered Frost.

"Good. Mr. Oscar Digby has disappeared. There is no doubt how. There can, of course, be no arrest, as Dr. Garland has just said. Our official position is this. We suspect that Mr. Digby has been murdered, but the search for the discovery of the body has failed. That is our position."

Before I left that awful house I made arrangements to have Muriel Scaiffe conveyed to a London hospital. I did not consult Mrs. Scaiffe on the subject. I could not get myself to say another word to the woman. In the hospital a private ward was secured for the unhappy girl, and there for many weeks she hovered between life and death.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Scaiffe and her brother were detained at The Rosary. They were closely watched by the police, and although they made many efforts to escape they found it impossible. Our hope was that when Muriel recovered strength she would be able to substantiate a case against them. But, alas! this hope was unfounded, for, as the girl recovered, there remained a blank in her memory which no efforts on our part could fill. She had absolutely and completely forgotten Oscar Digby, and the house on Hampstead Heath was to her as though it had never existed. In all other respects she was well. Under these circumstances we were forced to allow the Spaniard and his sister to return to their own country, our one most earnest hope being that we might never see or hear of them again.

Meanwhile, Muriel grew better. I was interested in her from the first. When she was well enough I placed her with some friends of my own. A year ago she became my wife. I think she is happy. A past which is forgotten cannot trouble her. I have long ago come to regard her as the best and truest woman living.

MIXED BATHING IN PREHISTORIC TIMES.—BY MR E. T. REED.
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A STORY FOR CHILDREN. BY R. E. VERNÈDE.

IT is related in the Fairy Chronicles that once upon a time Moralia was the topsy-turvyest country in the world. Pigs flew about there and fishes were to be seen walking on land, and if you decided that the tree in your garden was a pear tree it was pretty certain to grow strawberries in the winter and apples in the spring. That kind of thing, of course, had happened before in other kingdoms, but in Moralia it went to extremes. Take pigs, for instance. The trouble was not to drive them to market, but to get them to settle down when they had arrived there. Often, when a farmer thought he had his pigs fixed safely in the pig market and was bargaining with a trader for a fair price, whir-r-r—there would be a flutter of wings, and off the pigs would sail to the highest palm tree, leaving him agape!

"What can you expect in Moralia?" the intending purchaser would say, and would betake himself to some more certain market.

Again, travellers would often find the highways blocked by a shoal of herrings that had strolled ashore, and everyone would have to turn to and salt them where they stood, and in the meantime people could only get about by way of the canals, unless those were also blocked by cats and horses swimming for their pleasure.

It was annoying, too, to order a pound of greengages and find when you opened the bag that they had turned into mangoes or some sort of fruit that you didn't like nearly so much; or to purchase periwinkles and discover that they were really only pins. You cannot eat pins, at least, very few people can, and you cannot fasten dresses with periwinkles; and, naturally enough, trade soon fell away from Moralia. For nobody ever knew what was going to be what. At school the children used to write things with their india-rubber and erase them with their pencils. The schoolmaster used to say that he wouldn't have *his* pupils writing copper-plate. And certainly their copy books did not resemble it.

Altogether, matters in Moralia were in a very bad way. People in other countries shook their heads over it and said that it couldn't go on like that. They said that if that was Moralia's boasted civilization they didn't think much of it. All the same, it did go on until what I have to tell had happened. And the cause of the topsy-turviness, as very few people knew, was that the King of Moralia had offended a Wizard.

It happened in this way. The King, who was the most prim and proper gentleman in the world, a little too proper and prim, perhaps, was invited to attend a banquet the Wizard was giving. He didn't like to refuse, because that sort of invitation is equivalent to a command. But at the same time he disapproved of the whole thing. He disliked the Wizard and he hated anything magical—which is a foolish thing to do. As a result, he wore a very glum face throughout. When he opened his mouth at all it was to criticise the dresses and the behaviour of the fairies present or to speak sharply to the invisible hands that waited on him. Also, at the end of the feast, when the gnomes and trolls began to exchange cigars, and the Wizard himself, a little excited with nectar, perhaps, began to talk what seemed nonsense, the King could contain himself no longer.

"I can't agree with you," he exclaimed, at last.

"What about?" the Wizard inquired, frowning. He had noticed the King's behaviour already, and was by no means pleased.

"That two and two make five," said the King.

"Ah, but you don't make allowances," began the Wizard, "for what we——"

"They only make four," said the King, abruptly.

Now, if there is one thing that Wizards dislike more than being contradicted, it is being interrupted, and this one, though courteous for a Wizard, glowered.

"It seems to me," he said, very slowly and distinctly, "that you don't make allowances for what we call magic."

"No, I don't," snapped the King.

"Why not?"

"Because I think it's grossly exaggerated," said the King.

"Indeed!"

There was a dead pause as the Wizard spoke, and the King became aware that the eyes of all present were fixed upon him. There were green eyes, and red eyes, and white eyes, some fiery and some dull, but they all stared at him until he felt dizzy. He almost expected to be turned into a stone or a stock-pot or a stork. But as a matter of fact nothing, as it seemed, happened at all. Only, when the King arrived back in Moralia, having slept all night on the road, the magic had taken effect and Moralia was topsy-turvy.

The King's feelings may be imagined. He had been so orderly, and now everything was so contrary. He tried to wring his hands, but found himself walking on them instead, and he had to be content with wringing his legs. Anyone who has tried the process knows that it makes things appear even more curious than they are. For a moment the King fancied that it was only he that was bewitched, but he was mistaken. The Lord Chamberlain came in, and he was holding one arm to his side like a handle and the other curved outward like a spout.

"Is—is anything the matter with you, sire?" he asked, observing his Royal master in so unusual and undignified an attitude as is involved in trying to wring one's legs.

"No," said the King, sharply, "why should there be?"

"I don't know," said the Chamberlain, hurriedly. "But I fancied that you were ups——"

"What's the matter with you, though?" cried the King.

"Nothing," said the Chamberlain, who still held his left hand in the shape of a spout. "Nothing—nothing at all—but—er—'s a curious thing—very. I feel as if I were a tea-pot."

"A tea-pot?" repeated the King. He was about to say that, in that case, the Chamberlain had better resign his office, but, instead of doing so, he found himself crying out—

"Hurrah! I'm a tea-pot too. Let's all be tea-pots!"

Tea-pots the King and all his Court were for the rest of the day, in so far as curving their arms and wearing a strainer on their left hands could make them so. Next day the King suggested in a shamefaced way that they should all fly kites. And so they did, or rather the kites flew them. For the kites ran along the ground, while the King and all his Ministers performed the most curious gyrations in the air at the end of pieces of string, with long tails fastened on to them. Next day they fancied they were Polar bears, and insisted on climbing up poles and having buns thrown to them.

And so matters went from bad to worse

The strange thing was that nobody laughed at them, for everyone in Moralia was afflicted with some absurd fancy or other, and though all felt ashamed and ill at ease there was no one who could see precisely what was ludicrous and extravagant.

For the King had brought up his people to be very stiff and to disbelieve in magic, and though they were now bewitched they were all as solemn as ever. And at the end of sixteen years, when the King's daughter, the Princess Marianna, came of an age to be married, she was the most eccentric and most solemn person in the kingdom. It was natural enough that this should be so. The Queen-Mother had died when the Princess was but an infant, and Marianna had done as she pleased in the enchanted country all her days. Now she was the most beautiful Princess that has probably ever existed. Her hair was all gold and came below her knees, and her eyes were like violets, and she was lithe as a panther. The fame of her great beauty had induced many Kings and Princes to journey even to Moralia, which, for several reasons, had become one of the most perilous as well as one of the most trying places in the world to travel through. One reason was that the inhabitants would sit on the tree-tops and throw cocoa-nuts down on anyone passing; another, that the sign-posts were all put wrong, so that one wandered round and round as if in a maze, and as often as not got into some morass or fell into some hole that had been dug for an afternoon's amusement. But the chief reason was that the King had put at the head of affairs the most monstrous creature—a Sea Prince—who had come up out of the sea to make mischief in Moralia. The poor King thought he must be a genius because he was so ugly. He resembled a cod-fish with whiskers, and he walked sometimes on his fins and sometimes on his tail. And as he had determined to wed the Princess Marianna himself, despite his gruesome ugliness, he naturally encouraged her in all her eccentricities and cast every possible obstacle in the way of the Kings and Princes who came to woo her. Many of these had perished already, and it seemed likely on the day of Marianna's coming of age that no more would venture after her. Nor could her wedding be much longer delayed, since the King was getting old and must have some successor.

The cod-fish sat in the Cabinet that day and chuckled and rubbed his fins.

"I shall wed Marianna to-morrow," he gurgled to himself. And he opened and shut his great slit of a mouth in a way that one might suppose would have made even the most daft Princess shudder, if she could have seen it. But, as a matter of fact, Marianna was up and away in the woods, swinging in the high boughs of an acacia. She had not permitted any of her maidens to do anything for her. She would not have her hat on nor her shoes, and only at the last moment, in a spirit of fancifulness, she had caught up her opal slippers and taken them with her. The inhabitants of Moralia had given up the pastime of throwing cocoa-nuts from the trees at wayfarers, for, truth to tell, no wayfarers came along now. But Marianna had taken the radiant slippers because they were hard and easy to throw, and if anyone happened to pass by she should have something to hurl. Now, she was swinging in the acacia tree. Blossoms of the white, sweet flower dropped in showers about her, as the boughs swayed to and fro, and the sunlight caught in her hair. And she never gave a thought to anything or anybody, least of all to the Prince who at that moment was coming on horseback through the forest towards the acacia tree.

Nor, indeed, did Prince Rideo, for that was the young man's name, give very much thought to the Princess Marianna. He had heard vaguely of her beauty and of the topsy-turvy country where she lived. Being young and adventurous, and rashly fond of comedy, he had set out to see Moralia. That it was so perilous only added to the charm of journeying in it, and as for the Princess—if she were so lovely as was reported, why, he would see her at least. He might fall in love with her, perhaps, but he doubted it.

So he rode on, laughing to himself. He had encountered many strange things already, the finger-posts that led all wrong, and some winged pigs that started away like a covey of partridges, and lizards that lay in the shade to bask, and flies catching spiders in their webs, and sheep driving a flock of shepherds to their folds. Prince Rideo was greatly amused, though he had escaped with difficulty out of a morass and had been compelled to cut to pieces with his sword a herd of geese that attacked him. But he was more greatly astonished when he rode under the acacia tree and an opal slipper, very hard and pointed, hit him on the chest. He caught it before it fell to the ground, and then looked up into the tree.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

Marianna peeped out from among the blossoms, and he thought he had never seen

anyone so beautiful. She was sitting on a bough, very fearless, and cried out:—

"Give me back my slipper!"

"Did you drop it?" asked the Prince, smiling.

Marianna opened her eyes wide to see a man smile. She had never seen anyone in Moralia smile before, for their lack of humour was what made the enchantment work so successfully.

"No; I threw it," she said.

"Then I sha'n't give it to you again," said the Prince, putting it in his pocket.

"Why not?" asked Marianna.

"You might throw it again."

"I do as I please," said Marianna, haughtily. "Give it me back at once or I shall throw the other slipper."

As the Prince only laughed she threw the other.

"Now I have both," he said. "And if you are the Princess Marianna, I will only give them back to you on your wedding day."

"AS THE PRINCE ONLY LAUGHED SHE THREW THE OTHER SLIPPER."

He was so strange and unusual a person to see in that topsy-turvy country that the Princess, in spite of her anger, could not resist talking to him a little. She swung to a lower bough, and her hair was all about her like a cloth of gold.

"But I am to be wedded to-morrow," she said, seriously, "so that I must have my slippers."

"To whom?" asked Rideo, eagerly.

"To the Fish Prince," she said. "He is my father's councillor, and to-day my father is building the church, so that it may be ready for to-morrow."

Prince Rideo was so taken aback by this news that he hardly knew what to do. For he had fallen in love with her on the spot, and to think that Marianna should wed a Fish Prince disgusted him.

"Do you love him?" he asked her.

"Love?" Marianna repeated the word. "I don't know," she said. "I never thought of it."

"Then you shall not wed him," said the Prince, decidedly.

He was laughing again now, for he was light-hearted and saw no difficulties in the way.

"I shall ride straight to the King, your father," he said, "and tell him that I love you."

"Oh," said Marianna, thoughtfully.

That was all she said, for she did not understand what he meant. Everything was so topsy-turvy in Moralia that love was as unconsidered as laughter. But she did not

ask for the opal slippers again, and the Prince rode on with them in his pocket to the Court of the King. He rode so fast that he came to the end of the woods in no time, and, in the open land beyond, a curious sight met his eyes. Not only the capital city of Moralia stood there, and the great gates of entrance, and the palace, a stately mass of domes and minarets, but also the beginning of a building, such as Prince Rideo thought he had never seen before. It resembled more than anything the steeple of a church stuck the wrong way up in the ground, and all about it was a great concourse of people, working at it in a fashion quite their own. Some men stood with their tools balanced on their noses, one trying in this attitude to plane a log of wood, a second to hammer at a nail that a third was delicately balancing; others stood on their heads, mixing hods of mortar or holding buckets full of red-hot coals, such as workmen use, to the sides of bellows, as if the buckets could make a draught and the bellows a fire. Nobody paid any attention to Prince Rideo, until he asked:—

"Which is the King?"

AN ELDERLY MAN, WITH A REDDISH-GREY BEARD AND THIN LEGS, WAS RUNNING AIMLESSLY ABOUT BALANCING A LADDER ON HIS HEAD.

Then several pointed to an elderly man, with a reddish-grey beard and thin legs, who was running aimlessly about balancing a ladder on his head. A crown, fastened to his waist by a cord, dangled at his heels. He stopped as Prince Rideo went up to him.

"What do you want?" he cried.

"The hand of your daughter," said the Prince.

"Ah!" said the King, and he looked worried. "I'm sorry you can't stop now."

"But I can," the Prince objected.

"Ah—well—I can't," said the King. "You see, I'm trying to get this ladder up."

"What for?"

The King, who had started off, paused a moment at this question and put his hand to his head.

"Why, of course," he said, at last; "it's the church, you see. I'm building a church for my daughter to be married in to-morrow. Most churches are built on a wrong principle with their steeples at the top. This one's going to have it at the bottom. It's quick work—quick work."

And he began trotting round the steeple again, balancing the ladder and dragging the crown in the same absurd manner. When he completed the circuit, and saw the Prince still standing there, he cried out again:—

"What do you want?"

"The hand of your daughter."

"But she's engaged," said the King.

"She's going to be married to the Fish Prince, who is my Prime Minister, to-morrow. It's a very suitable match. I'm sorry you can't stay for the wedding. But the fact is there isn't a room in the palace to offer you. They're full up—full up."

"Full of what?" asked Prince Rideo, who knew that no strangers had come to Moralia for a long time.

"Full of water," the King explained. "It's a scheme I've got for breeding canaries under water. Quite new—quite new."

"Indeed!" said the Prince, politely. But the King was running round the steeple again, for the ladder would not remain balanced if he stopped for any length of time. So Prince Rideo rode on, hardly knowing whether to laugh or to cry. Coming to the palace, he inquired of the janitor for the Fish Prince.

"He is in the cabinet," said the janitor.

So the Prince rode on without dismounting till he came to the cabinet, and he beat on the door of it with the handle of his sword. The Fish Prince rose in great fear and came sidling to the door on his tail, for usually no one dared to disturb him. When he saw the Prince he blinked his lidless eyes and snapped his mouth up and down. "What do you want?" he asked, though he knew quite well what the Prince wanted.

"The hand of the Princess Marianna."

"That is impossible," gurgled the Fish Prince. "I am going to wed her to-morrow."

"You!" Prince Rideo looked at him with such scorn that the Fish Prince shook with shame, like a jelly-fish.

"The King has promised her to me," he choked out.

"Well," said Prince Rideo, "I will promise you something also. And that is, if you are not gone to the lowest ooze of the sea by to-morrow when I return, I will kill you with my own sword."

Then he turned his horse's head and rode away into the country. How was he to keep his promise? Moralia was in so topsy-turvy a state that the Fish Prince could do as he pleased in it and no one detected his hideousness. Prince Rideo ground his teeth to think of it, and his horse took the first road that happened and carried him into a woodless country of rock and sand. Quite suddenly the vision of the foolish King, balancing the ladder on his head, came to Prince Rideo's mind and, despite his disappointment, he laughed aloud.

"Did you laugh?" An old, old man came out from behind a rock and put the question. Prince Rideo replied courteously that he did.

"Who could help it?" he added.

"And yet," said the old man, "you are the first who has laughed in Moralia for many years. Lack-a-day!"

He looked so miserable that the Prince almost laughed again, and perhaps it was as well that he did not quite laugh. For the old man was, in reality, the Wizard who had cast the spell in Moralia, and the Fish Prince, who had taken such advantage of it, was his deadliest foe. But even wizards cannot always undo their mischief when they will. And it had been ordained by the fairies that only when a man who could laugh came to Moralia and brought to it a phial of the water from the fountain that is in the middle of the sea could the land regain its former state. So the Wizard was naturally very pleased to hear the Prince laugh, and explained why.

"Will you fill the phial from the fountain?" he asked.

The Prince turned his horse's head.

"I will go at once," he said.

"Ah," said the Wizard, smiling, "you are bold, Sir Prince. But remember one thing. The Fish Prince is your foe and has endless power over the sea. He will cast every obstacle in your way——"

"Give me the phial!" said the Prince, smiling.

"Here it is," said the Wizard. "And with your permission I will shoe your horse's feet, that they may not slip in the waves."

"Make haste, then," said Prince Rideo. "For by to-morrow I must be back to give Marianna her opal slippers."

The Wizard shod the horse swiftly with enchanted shoes, and it was well that he did so, for when Prince Rideo came to the sea-shore it seemed that he could go no farther, for the deep lay all around to the horizon, and there was no boat at hand or any wood with which to build a raft. But the horse galloped, and the Prince perceived that he was on a narrow causeway of rocks that ran out seaward just under the water's surface. It was more slippery than ice, but the horse sped on, until land became dim and indistinct behind him and then faded away.

"This is easier than I imagined," said Prince Rideo.

Hardly had he spoken when the sea became black with thousands of monstrous crabs, as big as men. They had claws like pincers and their beady eyes glared venomously. The Prince struck at them with his sword

bravely enough as they scuttled up the causeway; but the steel rang vainly on their backs, and the Prince would have been wrenched down and devoured had not the horse galloped like lightning along the rocks so that the crabs could not keep pace with him.

"The Fish Prince can do nothing," said Prince Rideo, exhilarated with the speed.

As he uttered this there arose a most rich and entrancing music to the left and to the right of him, and the Prince looking out in the sunset saw far off in the sea the most beautiful maidens singing to the melody of golden harps. They and their songs were so beautiful that the Prince pulled at the reins and would have ridden off the causeway to greet them; but the horse galloped on, on, on. And though the Prince was angry at first he saw later that there was good reason for it. For these were the sirens who wait for men in the sea to drag them down, and, as the sun sank on them, he saw that the maidens had sharks' tails and were a part of the Sea Prince's conspiracy.

"I had best be careful," he said.

And at the words the sun went down in the sea and a great storm rose. Billows swept hundreds of feet over the causeway, and the foam seemed to lash the very sky. But the horse galloped on, and Prince Rideo clung to the saddle manfully, though he was almost suffocated with surge. Sea-snakes swam alongside in that tempest, spitting, and squids, like branching trees, reached at him with their suckers, and giant rocks moved to and fro trying to clap him between them. But Prince Rideo spurred forward. And then quite suddenly the storm ceased, and the darkness was drawn apart like a curtain and the full moon came out. And there, just ahead of him, a fountain spirted out of the middle of the sea.

"THE SEA BECAME BLACK WITH THOUSANDS OF MONSTROUS CRABS, AS BIG AS MEN"

You may be sure that Prince Rideo filled his phial with no loss of time and set out on the return speedily. No peril threatened him now, but he had come farther than he supposed, and dawn broke before he had got to land and arrived in sight of the palace once more.

A great procession was moving towards the steeple, which still remained unfinished. The crowd of people was in every conceivable attitude except that of ordinary mortals walking on their two feet, and everyone was doing something intensely absurd

in the solemnest manner. At the head of the procession the King was walking on one leg with his crown round one knee, with the Archbishop beside him trying to roll his mitre like a hoop. Behind them walked the Princess Marianna, bare-foot, leaning on the fin of the Fish Prince. She looked so lovely that Prince Rideo's wrath knew no bounds, and he thundered up with his drawn sword and broke the phial violently in the fish's face.

The effect was instantaneous. Everyone came to their feet, stared, and burst out into laughter. The Archbishop ceased rolling his mitre, and the King slipped his crown on to his head. As for the Princess, she shrank back and looked with disgust on the Fish Prince.

"Who is this monster?" she cried, and shut her eyes. In that moment, while the creature still leared and snapped, Prince Rideo ran him through with his sword, as he had promised. All the crowd cheered and laughed.

But Prince Rideo held up his hand for silence.

"Moralia has been bewitched," he said, "for many years, but to-day the water of the Fountain of Laughter has broken the spell, as you all see. And now Moralia has become itself again."

Then he turned to Marianna.

"Will you wed me now?" he asked.

She smiled and blushed and looked more beautiful than ever.

"I have no shoes to go to church in," she said.

Prince Rideo drew out the opal slippers from his pocket.

"These will fit," he said, and she put out her foot for him to try them on.

"But—they are my own!" she exclaimed; and then it came back to her how the Prince had ridden under the acacia tree and all that had happened after, and she smiled and blushed again.

"Now you must marry me," said Prince Rideo.

"I will," said Marianna, and she did. For they went straight to one of the proper churches, with its steeple the right side up, and the Archbishop superintended the ceremony. Then the people asked the Prince to be King, and the old King asked him too.

"PRINCE RIDEO RAN HIM THROUGH WITH HIS SWORD."

So he was given the crown and ruled wisely and well. And no country in all the world was less topsy-turvy than Moralia, and probably no country ever will be.

By H. G. Wells.

THE scene amidst which Clayton told his last story comes back very vividly to my mind. There he sat, for the most part of the time, in the corner of the authentic settle by the spacious open fire, and Sanderson sat beside him smoking the Broseley clay that bore his name. There was Evans, and that marvel among actors, Wish, who is also a modest man. We had all come down to the Mermaid Club that Saturday morning, except Clayton, who had slept there overnight—which indeed gave him the opening of his story. We had golfed until golfing was invisible; we had dined, and we were in that mood of tranquil kindliness when men will suffer a story. When Clayton began to tell one, we naturally supposed he was lying. It may be that indeed he was lying—of that the reader will speedily be able to judge as well as I. He began, it is true, with an air of matter-of-fact anecdote, but that we thought was only the incurable artifice of the man.

"I say!" he remarked, after a long consideration of the upward rain of sparks from the log that Sanderson had thumped, "you know I was alone here last night?"

"Except for the domestics," said Wish.

"Who sleep in the other wing," said Clayton. "Yes. Well——" He pulled at his cigar for some little time as though he still hesitated about his confidence. Then he said, quite quietly, "I caught a ghost!"

"Caught a ghost, did you?" said Sanderson. "Where is it?"

And Evans, who admires Clayton immensely and has been four weeks in America, shouted, "*Caught* a ghost, did you, Clayton? I'm glad of it! Tell us all about it right now."

Clayton said he would in a minute, and asked him to shut the door.

He looked apologetically at me. "There's no eavesdropping of course, but we don't want to upset our very excellent service with any rumours of ghosts in the place. There's too much shadow and oak panelling to trifle with that. And this, you know, wasn't a regular ghost. I don't think it will come again—ever."

"You mean to say you didn't keep it?" said Sanderson.

"I hadn't the heart to," said Clayton.

And Sanderson said he was surprised.

We laughed, and Clayton looked aggrieved. "I know," he said, with the flicker of a smile, "but the fact is it really *was* a ghost, and I'm as sure of it as I am that I am talking to you now. I'm not joking. I mean what I say."

Sanderson drew deeply at his pipe, with one reddish eye on Clayton, and then emitted a thin jet of smoke more eloquent than many words.

Clayton ignored the comment. "It is the strangest thing that has ever happened in my life. You know I never believed in ghosts or anything of the sort before, ever, and then, you know, I bag one in a corner, and the whole business is in my hands!"

He meditated still more profoundly and produced and began to pierce a second cigar with a curious little stabber he affected.

"You talked to it?" asked Wish.

"For the space, probably, of an hour."

"Chatty?" I said, joining the party of the sceptics.

"The poor devil was in trouble," said Clayton, bowed over his cigar-end and with the very faintest note of reproof.

"Sobbing?" someone asked.

Clayton heaved a realistic sigh at the memory. "Good Lord!" he said; "yes." And then, "Poor fellow! yes."

"Where did you strike it?" asked Evans, in his best American accent.

"I never realized," said Clayton, ignoring him, "the poor sort of thing a ghost might be," and he hung us up again for a time, while he sought for matches in his pocket and lit and warmed to his cigar.

"I took an advantage," he reflected at last.

We were none of us in a hurry. "A character," he said, "remains just the same character for all that it's been disembodied. That's a thing we too often forget. People with a certain strength or fixity of purpose may have ghosts of a certain strength and fixity of purpose—most haunting ghosts, you know, must be as one-idea'd as monomaniacs and as obstinate as mules to come back again and again. This poor creature wasn't." He suddenly looked up rather queerly, and his eye went round the room. "I say it," he said, "in all kindliness, but that is the plain truth of the case. Even at the first glance he struck me as weak."

He punctuated with the help of his cigar.

"I came upon him, you know, in the long passage. His back was to me and I saw him first. Right off I knew him for a ghost. He was transparent and whitish, clean through his chest I could see the glimmer of the little window at the end. And not only his physique but his attitude struck me as being weak. He looked, you know, as though he didn't know in the slightest whatever he meant to do. One hand was on the panelling and the other fluttered to his mouth. Like—*so*!"

"What sort of physique?" said Sanderson.

"Lean. You know that sort of young man's neck that has two great flutings down the back, here and here—so. And a little, meanish head with scrubby hair and rather bad ears. Shoulders bad, narrower than the hips; turndown collar, ready-made short jacket, trousers baggy and a little frayed at the heels. That's how he took me. I came very quietly up the staircase. I did not carry a light, you know—the candles are on the landing table and there is that lamp—and I was in my list slippers, and I saw him as I came up. I stopped dead at that—taking him in. I wasn't a bit afraid. I think that in most of these affairs one is never nearly so afraid or excited as one imagines one would be. I was surprised and interested. I thought, 'Good Lord! Here's a ghost at last!' And I haven't believed for a moment in ghosts during the last five-and twenty years.'"

"Um," said Wish.

"I suppose I wasn't there a moment before he found out I was there. He turned on me sharply and I saw the face of an immature young man, a weak nose, a scrubby little moustache, a feeble chin. So for an instant we stood—he looking over his shoulder at me—and regarded one another. Then he seemed to remember his high calling. He turned round, drew himself up, projected his face, raised his arms, spread his hands in approved ghost fashion—came towards me. As he did so his little jaw dropped, and he emitted a faint, drawn-out 'Boo'. No, it wasn't—not a bit dreadful. I'd dined. I'd had a bottle of champagne and, being all alone, perhaps two or three—perhaps even four or five—whiskies, so I was as solid as rocks and no more frightened than if I'd been assailed by a frog. 'Boo!' I said. 'Nonsense. You don't belong to *this* place. What are you doing here?'

"I could see him wince. 'Boo-oo,' he said.

"'Boo—be hanged! Are you a mem-

ber?' I said; and just to show I didn't care a pin for him I stepped through a corner of him and made to light my candle. 'Are you a member?' I repeated, looking at him sideways.

"He moved a little so as to stand clear of me, and his bearing became crestfallen. 'No,' he said, in answer to the persistent interrogation of my eye, 'I'm not a member—I'm a ghost.'

"'Well, that doesn't give you the run of the Mermaid Club. Is there anyone you want to see, or anything of that sort?' And doing it as steadily as possible for fear that he should mistake the carelessness of whisky for the distraction of fear, I got my candle alight. I turned on him, holding it. 'What are you doing here?' I said.

business to haunt here. This is a respectable private club, people often stop here with nursemaids and children, and, going about in the careless way you do, some poor little mite might easily come upon you and be scared out of her wits. I suppose you didn't think of that?'

"'No, sir,' he said, 'I didn't.'

"'You should have done. You haven't any claim on the place, have you? Weren't murdered here, or anything of that sort?'

"'None, sir, but I thought as it was old and oak panelled——'

"'That's *no* excuse.' I regarded him firmly. 'Your coming here is a mistake,' I said, in a tone of friendly superiority. I feigned to see if I had my matches and then looked up at him frankly. 'If I were you

"'WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?' I SAID.

"He had dropped his hands and stopped his booing, and there he stood, abashed and awkward, the ghost of a weak, silly, aimless young man. 'I'm haunting,' he said.

"'You haven't any business to,' I said, in a quiet voice.

"'I'm a ghost,' he said, as if in defence.

"'That may be, but you haven't any

I wouldn't wait for cock-crow—I'd vanish right away.'

"He looked embarrassed. 'The fact *is*, sir——' he began.

"'I'd vanish,' I said, driving it home.

"'The fact is, sir, that—somehow—I can't.'

"'You *can't*?'

"'No, sir. There's something I've forgotten. I've been hanging about here since midnight last night, hiding in the cupboards of the empty bedrooms and things like that. I'm flurried. I've never come haunting before, and it seems to put me out.'

"'Put you out?'

"'Yes, sir. I've tried to do it several times, and it doesn't come off. There's some little thing has slipped me, and I can't get back.'

"That, you know, rather bowled me over. He looked at me in such an abject way that for the life of me I couldn't keep up quite the high, hectoring vein I had adopted. 'That's queer,' I said, and as I spoke I fancied I heard someone moving about down below. 'Come into my room and tell me more about it,' I said. 'I didn't, of course, understand this,' and I tried to take him by the arm. But, of course, you might as well have tried to take hold of a puff of smoke. I had forgotten my number, I think, anyhow, I remember going into several bedrooms—it was lucky I was the only soul in that wing—until I saw my traps. 'Here we are,' I said, and sat down in the arm-chair. 'Sit down and tell me all about it. It seems to me you have got yourself into a jolly awkward position, old chap.'

"Well, he said he wouldn't sit down, he'd prefer to flit up and down the room if it was all the same to me. And so he did, and in a little while we were deep in a long and serious talk. And presently, you know, something of those whiskies and sodas evaporated out of me, and I began to realize just a little what a thundering rum and weird business it was that I was in. There he was, semi-transparent—the proper conventional phantom, and noiseless except for his ghost of a voice—flitting to and fro in that nice, clean, chintz hung old bedroom. You could see the gleam of the copper candlesticks through him, and the lights on the brass fender, and the corners of the framed engravings on the wall, and there he was telling me all about this wretched little life of his that had recently ended on earth. He hadn't a particularly honest face, you know, but being transparent, of course, he couldn't avoid telling the truth."

"Eh?" said Wish, suddenly sitting up in his chair.

"What?" said Clayton.

"Being transparent — couldn't avoid telling the truth—I don't see it," said Wish.

"HE SAID HE WOULDN'T SIT DOWN, HE'D PREFER TO FLIT UP AND DOWN THE ROOM."

"*I* don't see it," said Clayton, with inimitable assurance. "But it *is* so, I can assure you nevertheless. I don't believe he got once a nail's breadth off the Bible truth.

He told me how he had been killed—he went down into a London basement with a candle to look for a leakage of gas—and described himself as a senior English master in a London private school when that release occurred."

"Poor wretch'" said I.

"That's what I thought, and the more he talked the more I thought it. 'There he was, purposeless in life and purposeless out of it. He talked of his father and mother and his schoolmaster, and all who had ever been anything to him in the world, meanly. He had been too sensitive, too nervous; none of them had ever valued him properly or understood him, he said. He had never had a real friend in the world, I think; he had never had a success. He had shirked games and failed examinations. 'It's like that with some people,' he said, 'whenever I get into the examination room or anywhere everything seems to go.' Engaged to be married of course—to another over-sensitive person, I suppose—when the indiscretion with the gas escape ended his affairs. 'And where are you now?' I asked. 'Not in——?'

"He wasn't clear on that point at all. The impression he gave me was of a sort of vague, intermediate state, a special reserve for souls too non-existent for anything so positive as either sin or virtue. *I* don't know. He was much too egotistical and unobservant to give me any clear idea of the kind of place, kind of country, there is on the Other Side of Things. Wherever he was, he seems to have fallen in with a set of kindred spirits—ghosts of weak Cockney young men, who were on a footing of Christian names, and among these there was certainly a lot of talk about 'going haunting' and things like that. Yes—going haunting! They seemed to think 'haunting' a tremendous adventure, and most of them funked it all the time. And so primed, you know, he had come."

"But really'" said Wish to the fire.

"These are the impressions he gave me, anyhow," said Clayton, modestly. "I may, of course, have been in a rather uncritical state, but that was the sort of background he gave to himself. He kept flitting up and down, with his thin voice going—talking, talking about his wretched self, and never a word of clear, firm statement from first to last. He was thinner and sillier and more pointless than if he had been real and alive. Only then, you know, he would not have been in my bedroom here—if he *had* been alive I should have kicked him out."

"Of course," said Evans, "there *are* poor mortals like that."

"And there's just as much chance of their having ghosts as the rest of us," I admitted.

"What gave a sort of point to him, you know, was the fact that he did seem within limits to have found himself out. The mess he had made of haunting had depressed him terribly. He had been told it would be a 'lark'; he had come expecting it to be a 'lark,' and here it was, nothing but another failure added to his record. He proclaimed himself an utter out-and-out failure. He said, and I can quite believe it, that he had never tried to do anything all his life that he hadn't made a perfect mess of—and through all the wastes of eternity he never would. If he had had sympathy, perhaps—— He paused at that, and stood regarding me. He remarked that, strange as it might seem to me, nobody, not anyone, ever, had given him the amount of sympathy I was doing now. I could see what he wanted straight away, and I determined to head him off at once. I may be a brute, you know, but being the Only Real Friend, the recipient of the confidences of one of these egotistical weaklings, ghost or body, is beyond my physical endurance. I got up briskly. 'Don't you brood on these things too much,' I said. 'The thing you've got to do is to get out of this—get out of this sharp. You pull yourself together and *try*.' 'I can't,' he said. 'You try,' I said, and try he did."

"'Try!'" said Sanderson. "*How?*"

"Passes," said Clayton.

"Passes?"

"Complicated series of gestures and passes with the hands. That's how he had come in and that's how he had to get out again. Lord! what a business I had'"

'But how could *any* series of passes——' I began.

"My dear man," said Clayton, turning on me and putting a great emphasis on certain words, "you want *everything* clear. *I* don't know *how*. All I know is that you *do*—that *he* did, anyhow, at least. After a fearful time, you know, he got his passes right and suddenly disappeared."

"Did you," said Sanderson, slowly, "observe the passes?"

"Yes," said Clayton, and seemed to think. "It was tremendously queer," he said. "There we were, I and this thin vague ghost in that silent room, in this silent, empty inn, in this silent little Friday-night town. Not a sound except our voices and a faint panting he made when he swung. There was

the bedroom candle, and one candle on the dressing-table alight, that was all—sometimes one or other would flare up into a tall, lean, astonished flame for a space. And queer things happened. 'I can't,' he said, 'I shall never——' And suddenly he sat down on a little chair at the foot of the bed and began to sob and sob. Lord! what a harrowing, whimpering thing he seemed!

"'You pull yourself together,' I said, and tried to put him on the back, and, you know, my confounded hand went through him. By that time, you know, I wasn't nearly so—massive as I had been on the landing. I got the queerness of it full. I remember

his finger in his pipe bowl. "You mean to say this ghost of yours gave away——"

"Did his level best to give away the whole confounded barrier? *Yes*."

"He didn't," said Wish, "he couldn't. Or you'd have gone there too."

"That's precisely it," I said, finding my elusive idea put into words for me.

"That *is* precisely it," said Clayton, with thoughtful eyes upon the fire.

For just a little while there was silence.

"And at last he did it?" said Sanderson.

"At last he did it. I had to keep him up to it hard, but he did it at last—rather suddenly. He despaired, we had a scene,

"I GOT THE QUEERNESS OF IT FULL."

snatching back my hand out of him, as it were, with a little thrill, and walking over to the dressing-table. 'You pull yourself together,' I said to him, 'and try.' And in order to encourage and help him I began to try as well."

"What?" said Sanderson, "the passes?"

"Yes, the passes."

"But——" I said, moved by an idea that eluded me for a space.

"This is interesting," said Sanderson, with

and then he got up suddenly and asked me to go through the whole performance, slowly, so that he might see. 'I believe,' he said, 'if I could *see* I should spot what was wrong at once.' And he did. 'I know,' he said. 'What do you know?' said I. 'I know,' he repeated. Then he said, suddenly, 'I *can't* do it if you look at me—I really *can't*, it's been that, partly, all along. I'm such a nervous fellow that you put me out.' Well, we had a bit of an argument. Naturally I

wanted to see; but he was as obstinate as a mule, and suddenly I had come over as tired as a dog—he tired me out. 'All right,' I said, '*I* won't look at you,' and turned towards the mirror, on the wardrobe, by the bed.

"He started off very fast. I tried to follow him by looking in the looking-glass, to see just what it was had hung. Round went his arms and his hands, so, and so, and so, and then with a rush came to the last gesture of all—you stand erect and open out your arms—and so, don't you know, he stood. And then he didn't! He didn't! He wasn't! I wheeled round from the looking-glass to him. There was nothing! I was alone, with the flaring candles and a staggering mind. What had happened? Had

"I WAS ALONE."

anything happened? Had I been dreaming? . . . And then, with an absurd note of finality about it, the clock upon the landing discovered the moment was ripe for striking *one*. So!—Ping! And I was as grave and sober as a judge, with all my champagne and whisky gone into the vast serene. Feeling queer, you know—confoundedly *queer*! Queer! Good Lord!"

He regarded his cigar ash for a moment. "That's all that happened," he said.

"And then you went to bed?" asked Evans.

"What else was there to do?"

I looked Wish in the eye. We wanted to scoff, and there was something, something perhaps in Clayton's voice and manner, that hampered our desire.

"And about these passes?" said Sanderson.

"I believe I could do them now."

"Oh!" said Sanderson, and produced a pen-knife and set himself to grub the dottel out of the bowl of his clay.

"Why don't you do them now?" said Sanderson, shutting his pen-knife with a click.

"That's what I'm going to do," said Clayton.

"They won't work," said Evans.

"If they do——" I suggested.

"You know, I'd rather you didn't," said Wish, stretching out his legs.

"Why?" asked Evans.

"I'd rather he didn't," said Wish.

"But he hasn't got 'em right," said Sanderson, plugging too much tobacco into his pipe.

"All the same, I'd rather he didn't," said Wish.

We argued with Wish. He said that for Clayton to go through those gestures was like mocking a serious matter. "But you don't believe——?" I said. Wish glanced at Clayton, who was staring into the fire, weighing something in his mind. "I do—more than half, anyhow, I do," said Wish.

"Clayton," said I, "you're too good a liar for us. Most of it was all right. But that disappearance . . . happened to be convincing. Tell us, it's a tale of cock and bull."

He stood up without heeding me, took the middle of the hearthrug, and faced me. For a moment he regarded his feet thoughtfully, and then for all the rest of the time his eyes were on the opposite wall, with an intent expression. He raised his two hands slowly to the level of his eyes and so began . . .

Now, Sanderson is a Freemason, a member of the lodge of the Four Kings, which

devotes itself so ably to the study and elucidation of all the mysteries of Masonry past and present, and among the students of this lodge Sanderson is by no means the least. He followed Clayton's motions with a singular interest in his reddish eye. "That's not bad," he said, when it was done. "You really do, you know, put things together, Clayton, in a most amazing fashion. But there's one little detail out."

"I know," said Clayton. "I believe I could tell you which."

"Well?"

"This," said Clayton, and did a queer little twist and writhing and thrust of the hands.

"Yes."

"That, you know, was what *he* couldn't get right," said Clayton. "But how do *you*——?"

"Most of this business, and particularly how you invented it, I don't understand at all," said Sanderson, "but just that phase—I do." He reflected. "These happen to be a series of gestures—connected with a certain branch of esoteric Masonry——probably you know. Or else—— *How?*" He reflected still further. "I do not see I can do any harm in telling you just the proper twist. After all, if you know, you know; if you don't, you don't."

"I know nothing," said Clayton, "except what the poor devil let out last night."

"Well, anyhow," said Sanderson, and placed his churchwarden very carefully upon the shelf over the fireplace. Then very rapidly he gesticulated with his hands.

"So?" said Clayton, repeating.

"So," said Sanderson, and took his pipe in hand again.

"Ah, *now*," said Clayton, "I can do the whole thing—right."

He stood up before the waning fire and smiled at us all. But I think there was just a little hesitation in his smile. "If I begin——" he said.

"I wouldn't begin," said Wish.

"It's all right!" said Evans. "Matter is indestructible. You don't think any jiggery pokery of this sort is going to snatch Clayton into the world of shades. Not it! You may try, Clayton, so far as I'm concerned, until your arms drop off at the wrists."

"I don't believe that," said Wish, and stood up and put his arm on Clayton's shoulder. "You've made me half believe in that story somehow, and I don't want to see the thing done."

"Goodness!" said I, "here's Wish frightened!"

"I am," said Wish, with real or admirably feigned intensity. "I believe that if he goes through these motions right he'll *go*."

"He'll not do anything of the sort," I cried. "There's only one way out of this world for men, and Clayton is thirty years from that. Besides . . . And such a ghost! Do you think——?"

Wish interrupted me by moving. He walked out from among our chairs and stopped beside the table and stood there. "Clayton," he said, "you're a fool."

Clayton, with a humorous light in his eyes, smiled back at him. "Wish," he said, "is right and all you others are wrong. I shall go. I shall get to the end of these passes, and as the last swish whistles through the air, Presto!—this hearthrug will be vacant, the room will be blank amazement, and a respectably dressed gentleman of seventeen stone will plump into the world of shades. I'm certain. So will you be. I decline to argue further. Let the thing be tried."

"*No*," said Wish, and made a step and ceased, and Clayton raised his hands once more to repeat the spirit's passing.

By that time, you know, we were all in a state of tension—largely because of the behaviour of Wish. We sat all of us with our eyes on Clayton—I, at least, with a sort of tight, stiff feeling about me as though from the back of my skull to the middle of my thighs my body had been changed to steel. And there, with a gravity that was imperturbably serene, Clayton bowed and swayed and waved his hands and arms before us. As he drew towards the end one piled up, one tingled in one's teeth. The last gesture, I have said, was to swing the arms out wide open, with the face held up. And when at last he swung out to this closing gesture I ceased even to breathe. It was ridiculous, of course, but you know that ghost story feeling. It was after dinner, in a queer, old shadowy house. Would he, after all——?

There he stood for one stupendous moment, with his arms open and his upturned face, assured and bright, in the glare of the hanging lamp. We hung through that moment as if it were an age, and then came from all of us something that was half a sigh of infinite relief and half a reassuring "*No!*" For visibly—he wasn't going. It was all nonsense. He had told an idle story, and carried it almost to conviction, that was all! . . . And then in that moment the face of Clayton changed.

It changed. It changed as a lit house

"HE STOOD THERE, VERY GENTLY SWAYING."

changes when its lights are suddenly extinguished. His eyes were suddenly eyes that are fixed, his smile was frozen on his lips, and he stood there still. He stood there, very gently swaying.

That moment, too, was an age. And then, you know, chairs were scraping, things were falling, and we were all moving. His knees seemed to give, and he fell forward, and Evans rose and caught him in his arms. . . .

It stunned us all. For a minute I suppose no one said a coherent thing. We believed it, yet could not believe it. . . . I came out of a muddled stupefaction to find myself kneeling beside him, and his vest and shirt were torn open, and Sanderson's hand lay on his heart. . . .

Well—the simple fact before us could very well wait our convenience; there was no hurry for us to comprehend. It lay there for an hour, it lies athwart my memory, black and amazing still, to this day. Clayton had, indeed, passed into the world that lies so near to and so far from our own, and he had gone thither by the only road that mortal man may take. But whether he did indeed pass there by that poor ghost's incantation, or whether he was stricken suddenly by apoplexy in the midst of an idle tale—as the coroner's jury would have us believe—is no matter for my judging; is just one of those inexplicable riddles that must remain unsolved until the final solution of all things shall come. All I certainly know is that, in the very moment, in the very instant, of concluding these passes he changed, and staggered and fell down before us—dead!

The Phoenix and the Carpet.

or The Gifts

By E. Nesbit

I.—THE FATAL GIFT OF BEAUTY

THE house was three miles from the station, but before the dusty hired fly had rattled along for five minutes the children began to put their heads out of the carriage window and to say, "Aren't we nearly there?" And every time they passed a house, which was not very often, they all said, "Oh, is this it?" But it never was, till they reached the very top of the hill, just past the chalk quarry and before you come to the gravel pit. And then there was a white house with a green garden and an orchard beyond, and mother said, "Here we are!"

"How white the house is!" said Robert.

"And look at the roses," said Jane.

"And the plums," said Anthea.

"It is rather decent," Cyril admitted.

The baby said, "Want go walky," and the fly stopped with a last rattle and jolt.

Everyone got its legs kicked or its feet trodden on in the scramble to get out of the carriage that minute, but no one seemed to mind. Mother, curiously enough, was in no hurry to get out, and even when she had come down slowly and by the step, and with no jump at all, she seemed to want to see the boxes carried in and even to pay the driver, instead of joining in that first glorious rush round the garden and the orchard and the thorny, thistly, briary, brambly wilderness beyond the broken gate and the dry fountain at the side of the house, and exploring the wilderness beyond. But the children were wiser, for once.

The children had explored the gardens and the outhouses thoroughly before they were caught and cleaned for tea, and they saw quite well that they were certain to be happy at the White House. They thought so from the first moment; but when they had found the back of the house covered with jasmine, all in white flower and smelling like a bottle of the most expensive scent that is ever given for a birthday present, and when they had seen the lawn, all green and smooth and quite different from the brown grass in the gardens at Camden Town, and when they had found the stable with a loft over it and some old hay still left they were almost certain, and when Robert had found the broken swing and tumbled out of it and got

a lump on his head the size of an egg, and Cyril had nipped his finger in the door of a hutch that seemed made to keep rabbits in, if you ever had any, no one had any longer any doubts whatever.

The best part of it all was that there were no rules about not going to places and not doing things. In London almost everything is labelled "You mustn't touch," and though the label is invisible it's just as bad, because you know it's there, or if you don't you jolly soon get told.

The White House was on the edge of a hill with a wood behind it — and the chalk-quarry on one side and the gravel-pit on the other. Down at the bottom of the hill was a level plain with queer shaped white buildings where people burnt lime, and a big red brewery and other houses, and when the big chimneys were smoking and the sun was setting the valley looked as if it were filled with golden mist, and was like an enchanted city out of the "Arabian Nights."

"CYRIL HAD NIPPED HIS FINGER IN THE DOOR OF A HUTCH."

Grown-up people find it very difficult to believe really wonderful things, unless they have what they call "proof." But children will believe almost anything, and grown-ups know this. That is why they tell you that the earth is round like an orange, when you can see perfectly well that it is flat and lumpy, and that the earth goes round the sun, when you can see for yourself any day that the sun gets up in the morning and goes to bed at night like a good sun as it is, and the earth knows its place and lies as still as a mouse. Yet I daresay you believe all that about the earth and the sun, and if so you will find it quite easy to believe that before Anthea and Cyril and the others had been a week in the country they had found a fairy. At least, they called it that because that was what it called itself, but it did not look much like it.

It was at the gravel-pits. Father had to go away suddenly on business, and mother had gone away to stay with granny because she was not very well. They both went in a great hurry, and when they were gone the house seemed very quiet and empty, and the children wandered from one room to another and looked at the bits of paper and string on the floors left over from the packing and not yet cleared up, and wished they had something to do. It was Cyril who said:—

"I say, let's take our Margate spades and go and dig in the gravel-pits. We can pretend it's seaside."

"Father says it was once," Anthea said; "he says there are shells there thousands of years old."

So they went. Of course, they had been to the edge of the gravel-pit and looked over, but they had not gone down into it for fear father should say they mustn't play there, and the same with the chalk-quarry. The gravel-pit is not really dangerous if you don't try to climb down the edges, but go the slow, safe way round by the road, as if you were a cart.

Each of the children carried its own spade, and took it in turns to carry the Lamb. He was the baby, and they called him the Lamb because "Baa" was the first thing he ever said. They called Anthea "Panther," which seems silly when you read it, but when you say it it sounds a little like her name.

The gravel-pit is very large and wide, with grass growing round the edges at the top and dry, stringy wild flowers, purple and yellow. It is like a giant's washhand-basin. And there are mounds of gravel, and holes in the sides of the basin where gravel has been taken out, and high up in the steep sides there are the little holes that are the little front doors of the little sand-martins' little houses.

The children built a castle, of course, but castles are rather poor fun when you have no hope of the swishing tide ever coming in to fill up the moat and wash away the drawbridge, and, at the happy last, to wet everybody up to the waist at least.

Cyril wanted to dig out a cave to play smugglers in, but the others thought it might bury them alive, so it ended in all spades going to work to dig a hole through the sand to Australia. These children, you see, believed that the world was round and that on the other side the little Australian boys and girls were really walking wrong way up, like flies on the ceiling, with their heads hanging down into the air.

The children dug and they dug and they dug, and their hands got sandy and hot and red, and their faces got damp and shiny. The Lamb had tried to eat the sand, and had cried so hard when he found that it was not, as he had supposed, brown sugar, that he was now tired out, and was lying asleep in a warm, fat bunch in the middle of the half-finished castle. This left his brothers and sisters free to work really hard, and the hole that was to come out in Australia soon grew so deep that Jane, who was called "Pussy" for short, begged the others to stop.

"Suppose the bottom of the hole gave way suddenly," she said, "and you tumbled out among the little Australians, all the sand would get in their eyes."

"ANTHEA SUDDENLY SCREAMED, 'IT'S ALIVE!'"

"Yes," said Robert, "they would hate us, and throw stones at us, and not let us see the kangaroos, or opossums, or emu-brand birds, or anything."

Cyril and Anthea knew that Australia was not quite so near as all that, but they agreed to stop using the spades and to go on with their hands. This was quite easy, because the sand at the bottom of the hole was very soft and fine and dry, like sea-sand. And there were little broken shells in it.

"Fancy it having been wet sea here once, all sloppy and shiny," said Jane, "with fishes and conger eels and coral and mermaids."

"And masts of ships and wrecked Spanish treasure. I wish we could find a gold doubloon or something," Cyril said.

"How did the sea get carried away?" Robert asked.

"Not in a pail, silly," said his brother. "Father says the earth got too hot underneath—as you do in bed sometimes—so it just hunched up its shoulders and the sea had to slip off, as the blankets do off us, and the shoulder was left sticking out and turned into dry land. Let's go and look for whole shells—I think that little cave looks likely, and I see something sticking out there like a bit of a wrecked ship's anchor, and it's beastly hot in the Australian hole."

The others agreed, but Anthea went on digging. She always liked to finish a thing when she had once begun it. She felt it would be a disgrace to leave that hole without getting through to Australia.

The cave was disappointing because there were no shells, and the wrecked ship's anchor turned out to be only the broken end of a pick-axe handle, and the cave party were just making up their minds that sand makes you thirstier when it is not by the sea-side, and some one had suggested going home for lemonade, when Anthea suddenly screamed—

"Cyril! Come here! Oh, come quick—it's alive! It'll get away! Quick!"

They all hurried back.

"It's a rat, I shouldn't wonder," said Robert. "Father says they infest old places—and this must be pretty old if the sea was here thousands of years ago——"

"Perhaps it is a snake," said Jane.

"Let's look," said Cyril, jumping into the hole. "I'm not afraid of snakes. I like them. If it is a snake I'll tame it and let it sleep round my neck at night."

"No, you won't," said Robert, firmly. "But you may if it's a rat."

"Oh, don't be silly," said Anthea, "it's not a rat, it's *much* bigger. And it's not a snake. It's got feet, I saw them, and fur. No—not the spade. You'll hurt it. Dig with your hands."

"And let *it* hurt *me* instead. That's so likely, isn't it?" said Cyril, seizing a spade.

"Oh, don't," said Anthea. "Squirrel, *don't*. I—it sounds silly, but it said some thing. It really and truly did——"

"What?"

"It said, 'You let me alone——'"

But Cyril merely observed that his sister must have gone off her nut, and he and Robert dug with spades, while Anthea sat on the edge of the hole, jumping up and down with hotness and anxiety. They dug carefully, and presently everyone could see that there really was something moving in the bottom of the Australian hole.

Then Anthea cried out, "*I'm* not afraid. Let me dig," and fell on her knees and began to scratch as a dog does when he has suddenly remembered where it was that he buried his bone.

"Oh, I felt fur," she cried, half laughing and half crying. "I did, indeed! I did!" when suddenly a dry, husky voice in the sand made them all jump back, and their hearts jumped nearly as fast as they did.

"Let me alone," it said. And now everyone heard the voice, and looked at the others to see if they had, too.

"But we want to see you," said Robert, bravely.

"I wish you'd come out," said Anthea, also taking courage.

"Oh, well—if that's your wish," the voice said, and the sand stirred and spun and scattered, and something brown and furry and fat came rolling out into the hole, and the sand fell off it, and it sat there yawning and rubbing the ends of its eyes with its hands.

"I believe I must have dropped asleep," it said, stretching itself.

The children stood round the hole in a ring, looking at the creature they had found. It was worth looking at. Its eyes were on long horns like a snail's eyes, and it could move them in and out like telescopes; it had ears like bats' ears, and its tubby body was shaped like a spider's and covered with thick, soft fur; its legs and arms were furry, too, and it had hands and feet like a monkey's.

"What on earth is it?" Jane said. "Shall we take it home?"

The thing turned its long eyes to look at her and said:—

"Does she always talk nonsense, or is it only the rubbish on her head that makes her silly?"

It looked scornfully at Jane's hat as it spoke.

"She doesn't mean to be silly," Anthea said, gently. "We none of us do, whatever you may think. Don't be frightened; we don't want to hurt you, you know."

"Hurt *me*?" it said. "*Me* frightened? Upon my word! Why, you talk as if I were nobody in particular." All its fur stood out like a cat's when it is going to fight.

"Well," said Anthea, still kindly, "perhaps if we knew what you are in particular we could think of something to say that wouldn't make you cross. Everything we've said so far seems to have. Who are you? And don't get angry. Because really we don't know."

"You don't know?" it said. "Well, I knew the world had changed, but—— Well, really, do you mean to tell me seriously you don't know a psammead when you see one?"

"A sammyadd? That's Greek to me."

"So it is to everyone," said the creature, sharply. "Well, in plain English, then, a sand-fairy. Don't you know a sand-fairy when you see one?"

It looked so grieved and hurt that Jane hastened to say: "Of course, I see you are, *now*. It's quite plain now one comes to look at you."

"You came to look at me several sentences ago," it said, crossly, beginning to curl up again in the sand.

"Oh, don't go away again! Do talk some more," Robert cried. "I didn't know you were a sand-fairy, but I knew directly I saw you that you were much the wonderfullest thing I ever saw."

The sand-fairy seemed a shade less disagreeable after this.

"It isn't talking I mind," it said, "as long as you're reasonably civil. But I'm not going to make polite conversation for you. If you talk nicely to me, perhaps I'll answer you and perhaps I won't. Now say something."

Of course, no one could think of anything to say, but at last Robert thought of "How

"THE PSAMMEAD."

long have you lived here?" and he said it at once.

"Oh, ages — several thousand years," replied the psammead.

"Tell us all about it. Do——"

"It's all in books."

"*You* aren't," Jane said. "Oh, tell us everything you can about yourself. We don't know anything about you, and you *are* so nice."

The sand fairy smoothed its long, rat like whiskers and smiled.

"Do, please, tell," said the children all together.

It is wonderful how quickly you get used to things, even the most astonishing. Five minutes before the children had had no more idea than you had that there was such a thing as a sand-fairy, and now they were talking to it as though they had known it all their lives.

It drew its eyes in and said —

"How very sunny it is, quite like old times! Where do you get your megatheriums from now?"

"What?" said the children all at once. It is very difficult always to remember that "what" is not polite, especially in moments of surprise or agitation.

"Are pterodactyls plentiful now?" the sand fairy went on.

The children were unable to reply.

"What do you have for breakfast?" the fairy said, impatiently. "And who gives it you?"

"Eggs and bacon and bread and milk and porridge and things. Mother gives it us. What are mega—what's-its-names and ptero—what-do-you-call-thems? And does anyone have them for breakfast?"

"Why, almost everyone had pterodactyls for breakfast in my time. Pterodactyls were something like crocodiles and something like birds. I believe they were very good grilled. You see, it was like this: of course, there were heaps of sand-fairies then, and in the morning early you went out and hunted for them, and when you'd found one it gave you your wish. People used to send their little boys down to the sea-shore early in the morning before breakfast to get the day's wishes, and very often the eldest boy in a family would be told to wish for a megatherium ready jointed for cooking, because it was rather awkward to kill. It was as big as an elephant, you see, so there was a good deal of meat on it. And if they wanted fish the ichthyosaurus was asked for—he was twenty to forty feet long, so there was plenty of him. And for poultry there was the plesiosaurus—there were nice pickings on that, too. Then the other children could wish for other things. But when people had dinner-parties it was nearly always megatherium and ichthyosaurus, because his fins were a great delicacy and his tail made soup."

"There must have been heaps and heaps of cold meat left over," said Anthea, who meant to be a good housekeeper some day.

"Oh, no," said the psammead, "that would never have done. Why, of course, at sunset what was left over turned into stone. You find the stone bones of the megatherium and things all over the place even now, they tell me."

"Who tell you?" asked Cyril; but the sand-fairy frowned and began to dig very fast with its furry hands.

"Oh, don't go," they all cried; "tell us more about when it was megatheriums for breakfast. Was the world like this then?"

It stopped digging.

"Not a bit," it said, "it was nearly all sand where I lived, and coal grew on trees and the periwinkles were as big as tea-trays—you find them sometimes now, only they're turned into stone. We sand-fairies used to live on the sea-shore, and the children used to come with flint spades and pails and make castles for us to live in. That's thousands of years ago, but I hear that children still build castles on the sand. It's difficult to break yourself of a habit——"

"But why did you stop living in the castles?" asked Robert.

"It's a sad story," said the psammead, gloomily, "it was because they would build moats to the castles, and the nasty wet, bubbling sea used to come in, and, of course, as soon as a sand-fairy got wet it caught cold, and generally died, and so there got to be fewer and fewer, and whenever you found a fairy and had a wish you used to wish for a megatherium and eat twice as much of it as you wanted, because it might be weeks before you got another wish."

"And did *you* get wet?" Robert inquired.

The sand-fairy shuddered. "Only once," it said, "the end of the twelfth hair of my top left whisker—I feel the place still in bad weather. It was only once, but it was quite enough for me. I went away as soon as the sun had dried my poor, dear whisker. I skurried away to the back of the beach and dug myself a house deep in warm, dry sand, and there I've been ever since. And the sea changed its lodgings afterwards. And now I'm not going to tell you another thing."

"Just one more, please," said the children. "Can you give wishes now?"

"Of course," it said, "didn't I give you yours a few minutes ago? You said, 'I wish you'd come out,' and I did."

"Oh, please, mayn't we have another?"

"Yes, but be quick about it. I'm tired of you."

I dare say you have often thought what you would do if you had three wishes given you, and have despised the old man and his wife in the black-pudding story, and felt certain that if you had the chance you could think of three really useful wishes without a moment's hesitation. These children had often talked this matter over, but now the chance had suddenly come to them they could not make up their minds.

"Quick," said the sand-fairy, crossly, and the only one who could think of anything was Anthea, and she could only think of a private wish of her own and Jane's, which they had never told the boys. She knew the boys would not care about it—but still it was better than nothing.

"I wish we were all as beautiful as the day," she said, in a great hurry.

The children looked at each other, but each could see that the others were not any better-looking than usual. The psammead pushed out its long eyes, and seemed to be holding its breath and swelling itself out till it was twice as fat and furry as before. Suddenly it let its breath go, in a long sigh.

"I'm really afraid I can't manage it," it said, apologetically. "I must be out of practice."

The children were horribly disappointed.

"Oh, *do* try again," they said.

"Well," said the sand-fairy, "the fact is, I was keeping back a little strength to give the rest of you your wishes with. If you'll be contented with one wish a day among the lot of you I dare say I can screw myself up to it. Do you agree to that?"

"Yes, oh, yes," said Jane and Anthea. The boys nodded. They did not believe the sand-fairy could do it.

It stretched out its eyes farther than ever, and swelled and swelled and swelled.

"I do hope it won't hurt itself," said Anthea.

"Or crack its skin," Robert said, anxiously.

Everyone was very much relieved when the sand-fairy, after getting so big that it almost filled up the hole in the sand, suddenly let out its breath and went back to its proper size.

"That's all right," it said, panting heavily. "It'll come easier to-morrow."

"Did it hurt much?" asked Anthea.

"Only my poor whisker, thank you," it said, "but you're a kind and thoughtful child. Good-day."

It scratched suddenly and fiercely with its hands and feet and disappeared in the sand. Then the children looked at each other, and each child suddenly found itself alone with three perfect strangers, all radiantly beautiful.

They stood for some moments in perfect silence. Each thought that its brothers and sisters had wandered off, and that these strange children had stolen up unnoticed while it was watching the swelling form of the sand fairy. Anthea spoke first —

"Excuse me," she said, very politely, to Jane, who now had enormous blue eyes and a cloud of russet hair, "but have you seen two little boys and a little girl anywhere about?"

"I was just going to ask you that," said Jane, and then Cyril cried —

"Why, it's *you!* I know the hole in your pinafore! You *are* Jane, aren't you? And you're the Panther. I can see your dirty handkerchief, that you forgot to change after you'd cut your thumb! Crikey! The wish *has* come off, after all. I say, am I as handsome as you are?"

"If you're Cyril, I liked you much better as you were before," said Anthea, decidedly. "You look like the picture of the young chorister, with your golden hair, and if that's Robert, he's like an Italian organ-grinder. His hair's all black."

"You two girls are like Christmas cards, then, that's all — silly Christmas cards," said Robert, angrily. "And Jane's hair is simply carrots."

It was, indeed, of that Venetian tint so much admired by artists.

"Well, it's no use finding fault with each other," said Jane. "Let's get the Lamb and lug it home to dinner. The servants will admire us most awfully, you'll see."

Baby was just waking up when they got to him, and not one of the children but was relieved to find that he, at least, was not as beautiful as the day, but just the same as usual.

"I suppose he's too young for wishes to act on him," said Jane. "Or perhaps it's because he wasn't with us."

Anthea ran forward and held out her arms.

"Come to Panther, ducky," she said.

The baby looked at her disapprovingly and put a sandy pink thumb in his mouth. Anthea was his favourite sister.

"Come, then," she said.

"G'way long!" said the baby.

"Come to own Pussy," said Jane.

"Wants my Pantie," said the Lamb, dismally, and his lip trembled.

"Here, come on, veteran," said Robert, "come and have a yidey on Yobby's back."

"Yah, narky, narky boy," howled the baby, giving way altogether. Then the children knew the worst. *The baby did not know them!*

"THE BABY DID NOT KNOW THEM."

They looked at each other in despair, and it was terrible to each, in this dire emergency, to meet only the beautiful eyes of perfect strangers, instead of the merry, friendly, commonplace, twinkling, jolly little eyes of its own brothers and sisters.

"This is most awful," said Cyril, when he

had tried to lift up the Lamb, and the Lamb had scratched like a cat and bellowed like a bull. "We've got to *make friends* with him. We can't carry him home screaming like that. Fancy having to make friends with our own baby! It's too silly."

That, however, was exactly what they had to do. It took over an hour, and the task was not rendered any easier by the fact that the Lamb was by this time as hungry as a lion and as thirsty as a desert.

At last he consented to allow these strangers to carry him home by turns, but, as he refused to hold on to such new acquaintances, he was a dead weight and most exhausting.

"Thank goodness we're home," said Jane, staggering through the iron gate to where Martha, the nursemaid, stood at the front door, shading her eyes with her hand and looking out anxiously. "Here! Do take baby!"

Martha snatched the baby from her arms.

"Thanks be, *he's* safe back," she said, "Where are the others, and whoever to goodness gracious are all of you?"

"We're *us*, of course," said Robert.

"And who's us, when you're at home?" asked Martha, scornfully.

"I tell you it's *us*, only we're beautiful as the day," said Cyril. "I'm Cyril and these are the others, and we're jolly hungry. Let us in and don't be a silly idiot."

Martha merely drattled the speaker's impudence and tried to shut the door in his face.

"I know we *look* different, but I'm Anthea, and we're so tired and it's long past dinner-time."

"Then go home to your dinners, whoever you are, and if our children put you up to this play-acting you can tell them from me they'll catch it, so they know what to expect." With that she did bang the door. Cyril rang the bell violently. No answer. Presently cook put her head out of a bedroom window and said—

"If you don't take yourselves off, and that sharp, I'll go and fetch the police." And she slammed down the window.

"It's no good," said Anthea. "Oh, do come away before we get sent to prison."

The boys said it was nonsense, and the law of England couldn't put you in prison for just being as beautiful as the day, but they followed the others out into the lane.

"We shall be our proper selves after sunset, I suppose," said Jane.

"I don't know," Cyril said, sadly. "It mayn't be like that now—things have changed a good deal since megatherium times."

"Oh," cried Anthea, suddenly, "perhaps we shall turn into stone at sunset, like the megatheriums, so that there mayn't be any of us left over for the next day."

She began to cry, so did Jane. Even the boys turned pale. No one had the heart to say anything.

It was a horrible afternoon. There was no house near where the children could beg a crust of bread or even a glass of water. They were afraid to go to the village because they had seen the cook go down there with a basket, and there was a local constable. True, they were all as beautiful as the day, but that is a poor comfort when you are as hungry as a hunter and as thirsty as a sponge.

Three times they tried in vain to get the servants in the White House to let them in and to listen to their tale. And then Robert went alone, hoping to be able to climb in at one of the back windows, and so open the door to the others. But all the windows were out of reach, and Martha emptied a toilet jug of cold water over him from a top window and said—

"Go along with you, you nasty little Eyetalian monkey."

It came at last to their sitting down in a row under the hedge, with their feet in a dry ditch, waiting for sunset, and wondering whether when the sun did set they would turn into stone, or only into their own old natural selves, and each of them still felt lonely and among strangers, and tried not to look at the others, for though their voices were their own their faces were so radiantly beautiful as to be quite irritating to look at.

"I don't believe we *shall* turn to stone," said Robert, breaking a long, miserable silence, "because the sand-fairy said he'd give us another wish to-morrow, and he couldn't if we were stone, could he?"

The others said "No," but they weren't at all comforted.

Another silence, longer and more miserable, was broken by Cyril's suddenly saying, "I don't want to frighten you girls, but I believe it's beginning with me already. My hand's quite dead. I'm turning to stone, I know I am, and so will you in a minute."

"Never mind," said Robert, kindly, trying to keep up the spirits of the others, "perhaps you'll be the only stone one, and the rest of us will be all right, and we'll cherish your statue and hang garlands on it."

But when it turned out that Cyril's hand

had only gone to sleep through his leaning on it too long, and when it came to life in an agony of pins and needles, the others were quite cross.

"Giving us such a fright for nothing," said Anthea.

The third and miserablest silence of all was broken by Jane. She said —

"If we *do* come out of this all right we'll ask the sammyadd to make it so that the servants don't notice anything different, no matter what wishes we have."

The others only grunted. They were too wretched even to make good resolutions.

At last hunger and fright and crossness and tiredness, four very nasty things, all joined together to bring one nice thing, and that was sleep. The children lay asleep in a row, with their beautiful eyes shut and their beautiful mouths open. Anthea woke first. The sun had set and the twilight was coming on.

Anthea pinched herself very hard to make sure, and when she found she could still feel pinching she decided that she was not stone, and then she pinched the others. They also were soft and could feel a pinch.

"Wake up!" she said, almost in tears for joy. "It's all right, we're not stone. And, oh, Cyril, how nice and ugly you do look, with your old freckles and your brown hair and your little eyes. And so do you all," she added, so that they might not feel jealous.

When they got home they were very much scolded by Martha, who told them about the strange children.

"A good looking lot, I must say, but that impudent."

"I know," said Robert, who knew by experience how hopeless it would be to try explaining things to Martha.

"MARTHA EMPTIED A TOILET JUG OF COLD WATER OVER HIM."

"And where on earth have you been all this time, you naughty little things, you?"

"In the lane."

"Why didn't you come home hours ago?"

"We couldn't because of *them*," said Anthea.

"Who?"

"The children who were as beautiful as the day. They kept us there till after sunset. We couldn't come back till they'd gone. You don't know how we hated them. Oh, do — do give us some supper. We are so hungry."

"Hungry! I should think so," said Martha, angrily, "out all day like this! Well, I hope it'll be a lesson to you not to go picking up with strange children — down here after measles as likely as not. Now, mind, if you see them again don't you speak to them, but come straight away and tell me. I'll spoil their beauty for them!"

"If ever we *do* see them again we'll tell you," Anthea said, and Robert, fixing his eyes fondly on the cold beef that was being brought in on a tray by cook, added, in heartfelt undertones —

"And we'll take jolly good care we never *do* see them again."

And they never have.

By E. Nesbit.

II—THE GIFT OF GUINEAS

ANTHEA woke in the morning from a very real sort of dream, in which she was walking in the Zoological Gardens on a pouring wet day without any umbrella. The animals seemed desperately unhappy because of the rain and were all growling gloomily. When she awoke both the growling and the rain went on just the same. The growling was the heavy, regular breathing of her sister Jane, who had a slight cold and was still asleep. The rain fell in slow drops on to Anthea's face from the wet corner of a bath-towel which her brother Robert was gently squeezing the water out of to wake her up, as he now explained.

"Oh, drop it," she said, rather crossly; so he did, for he was not a brutal brother, though very ingenious in apple-pie beds, booby traps, original methods of awakening sleeping relatives, and the other little accomplishments which make home happy.

"I had such a funny dream," Anthea began.

"So did I," said Jane, wakening suddenly and without warning. "I dreamed we found a sand-fairy in the gravel pits, and it said it was a sammyadd, and we might have a new wish every day, and —"

"But that's what *I* dreamed," said Robert. "I was just going to tell you. And we had the first wish directly it said so. And I dreamed you girls were donkeys enough to ask for us all to be beautiful as the day, and we jolly well were, and it was perfectly beastly."

"But *can* different people all dream the same thing?" said Anthea, sitting up in bed, "because I dreamed all that, as well as about the Zoo and the rain, and baby didn't know us in my dream, and the servants shut us out of the house because our radiant beauty was such a complete disguise, and——"

The voice of the eldest brother sounded from across the landing:—

"Come on, Robert," it said, "you'll be late for breakfast again, unless you mean to shirk your bath, as you did on Tuesday."

"I say, come here a sec," Robert replied. "I didn't shirk it, I had it after brekker, in father's dressing-room, because ours was emptied away."

Cyril appeared in the doorway, partially clothed.

"Look here," said Anthea, "we've all had such an odd dream. We've all dreamed we found a sand-fairy."

Her voice died away before Cyril's contemptuous glance. "Dream?" he said, "you little sillies, it's *true*. I tell you it all happened. That's why I'm so keen on being

down early. We'll go up there directly after brekker and have another wish. Only we'll make up our minds solid before we go what it is we do want, and no one must ask for anything unless the others agree first. No more peerless beauties for this child, thank you. Not if I know it."

The other three dressed with their mouths open. If all that dream about the sand fairy was real, this real dressing seemed very like a dream, the girls thought. Jane felt that Robert was right, but Anthea was not sure till after they had seen Martha and heard her full and plain reminders about their naughty conduct the day before. Then Anthea was sure, "because," said she, "servants never dream anything but the things in the dream-book—like snakes and oysters and going to a wedding—that means a funeral, and snakes are a false female friend, and oysters are babies."

"Talking of babies," said Cyril, "where's the Lamb?"

"Martha's going to take him to Rochester to see her cousins. Mother said she might. She's dressing him now," said Jane, "in his very best coat and hat. Bread and butter, please."

"She seems to *like* taking him, too," said Robert, in a tone of wonder.

"Servants *do* like taking babies to see their relations," Cyril said. "I've noticed it before; especially in their best things."

"I expect they pretend they're their own babies, and that they're not servants at all, but married to noble dukes of high degree; and they say the babies are the little dukes and duchesses," Jane suggested, dreamily, taking more marmalade. "I expect that's what Martha'll say to her cousin. She'll enjoy herself frightfully."

"She won't enjoy herself frightfully carrying our infant duke to Rochester," said Robert, "not if she's anything like me, she won't."

"Fancy walking to Rochester with the Lamb on your back! Oh, crikey," said Cyril, in full agreement.

"She's going by carrier," said Jane. "Let's see them off, then we shall have done a polite and kindly act, and we shall be quite sure we've got rid of them for the day."

So they did.

Martha wore her Sunday dress of two shades of purple, so tight in the chest that it made her stoop, and her blue hat with the pink cornflowers and the white ribbon. And the Lamb had indeed his very best coat and hat. It was a smart party that the carrier's cart picked up at the cross-roads. Its white tilt and red wheels had slowly vanished in a swirl of chalk dust.

"And now for the sammyadd!" said Cyril, and off they went.

As they went they decided on the wish they would ask for. Although they were all in a great hurry they did not try to climb down the sides of the gravel pit, but went round by the safe lower road, as if they were carts. They had made a ring of stones round the place where the sand fairy had disappeared, so they easily found the spot. The sun was burning and bright and the sky was deep blue—without a cloud. The sand was very hot to touch.

"Oh, suppose it was only a dream after all," Robert said, as the boys uncovered their spades from the sand heap where they had buried them and began to dig.

"Suppose you were a sensible chap," said Cyril; "one's quite as likely as the other!"

"Suppose you kept a civil tongue in your head," Robert snapped.

"Suppose we girls take a turn," said Jane, laughing. "You boys seem to be getting very warm."

"Suppose you don't come shoving your silly oar in," said Robert, who was now warm indeed.

"We won't," said Anthea, quickly. "Robert, dear, don't be so grumpy—we won't say a word; you shall be the one to speak to the fairy and tell him what we've decided to wish for. You'll say it much better than we shall."

"Suppose you drop being a little humbug," said Robert, but not crossly. "Look out—dig with your hands, now!"

So they did, and presently uncovered the spider-shaped, brown, hairy body, long arms and legs, bat's ears, and snail's eyes of the psammead itself. Everyone drew a deep breath of satisfaction, for now, of course, it couldn't have been a dream.

The psammead sat up and shook the sand out of its fur.

"How's your left whisker this morning?" said Anthea.

"Nothing to boast of," it said, "it had rather a restless night. But thank you for asking."

"I say," said Robert, "do you feel up to giving wishes to-day, because we very much want an extra, besides the regular one. The extra's a very little one," he added, reassuringly.

"Humph!" said the sand-fairy. (If you read this story aloud please pronounce

"humph" exactly as it is spelt, for that is how it said it.) "Humph! Do you know until I heard you being disagreeable to each other just over my head, and so loud, too, I really quite thought I had dreamed you all? I do have very odd dreams sometimes"

"Do you?" Jane hurried to say, so as to get away from the subject of disagreeableness. "I wish," she added, politely, "you'd tells us about your dreams—they must be awfully interesting"

"Is that the day's wish?" said the sand-fairy, yawning

Cyril muttered something about "just like a girl," and the rest stood silent. If they said "yes," then good-bye to the other wish they had decided to ask for. If they said "no," it would be very rude, and they had all been taught manners, and had learned a little, too, which is not the same thing. A sigh of relief broke from all lips when the sand fairy said—

"If I do, I sha'n't have strength to give you a second wish, not even good tempers, or common sense, or manners, or little things like that'

"We don't want you to put yourself out at all about *these* things, we can manage them quite well ourselves,' said Cyril, eagerly, while the others looked guiltily at each other and wished the fairy would not keep all on about good tempers, but give them one good rowing if it wanted to, and then have done with it

"Well," said the psammead, putting out its long snail's eyes so suddenly that one of them nearly went into the round boy's eye of Robert, "let's have the little wish first."

"We don't want the servants to notice the gifts you give us"

"Are kind enough to give us," said Anthea, in a whisper.

"Are kind enough to give us, I mean," said Robert.

The fairy swelled itself out a bit, let its breath go, and said—

"I've done *that* for you—it was quite easy. People don't notice things much, any way. What's the next wish?"

"We want," said Robert, slowly, "to be rich beyond the dreams of something or other"

"Avarice," said Jane.

"So it is," said the fairy, unexpectedly. "But it won't do you much good, that's one comfort," it muttered to itself. "Come, I can't go beyond dreams, you know. How much do you want, and will you have it in gold or notes?"

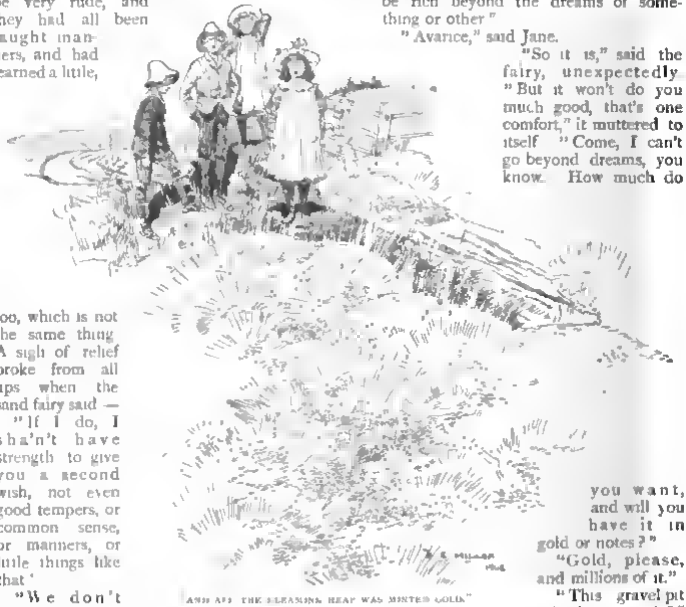
"Gold, please, and millions of it."

"This gravel pit full be enough?" said the fairy, in an off hand manner.

"Oh, *yes*"

"Then get out before I begin, or you'll be buried alive in it"

It waved its long, skinny arms so frighten



"AND AT THE SEASIDE HEAP WAS MINTED GOLD"

ingly that the children ran as hard as they could towards the road by which carts used to come to the gravel-pits. Only Anthea had presence of mind enough to shout a timid "Good morning, I hope your whisker will be better to-morrow," as she ran.

On the road they turned and looked back, and they had to shut their eyes and open them very slowly, a little bit at a time, because the sight was too dazzling for their eyes to be able to bear it. It was something like trying to look at the sun at high noon on Midsummer Day. For the whole of the sand-pit was full right up to the very top with new shining gold pieces, and all the little sand-martins' tiny front doors were covered out of sight. Where the road for carts wound into the gravel-pit the gold lay in mounds like stones by the road-side, and a great bank of shining gold shelved down from where it lay flat and smooth between the tall sides of the gravel-pit. And all the gleaming heap was minted gold. And on the sides and edges of these countless coins the midday sun shone and sparkled and glowed and gleamed till the quarry looked like the mouth of a smelting furnace, or one of the fairy halls that you see sometimes in the sky at sunset.

The children stood with their mouths open, and no one said a word.

At last Robert stooped and picked up one of the loose coins from the edge of the heap by the cart-road and looked at it. He looked on both sides. Then he said in a low voice, quite different from his own, "It's not sovereigns."

"It's gold, any way," said Cyril, and now they all began to talk at once. They all picked up the golden treasure by handfuls and let it run through their fingers like water, and the chink it made as it fell was wonderful music. At first they quite forgot to think of spending the money, it was so nice to play with. Jane sat down between two heaps of gold and Robert began to bury her, as you bury your father in sand when you are at the sea-side and he has gone to sleep on the beach with his newspaper over his face. But Jane was not half-buried before she cried out "Oh, stop, it's too heavy, it hurts."

Robert said "Bosh" and went on.

"Let me out, I tell you," cried Jane, and was taken out, very white and trembling a little.

"You've no idea what it's like," said she, "it's like stones on you, or like chains."

"Look here," Cyril said, "if this is to do us any good it's no good our staying garping at it like this. Let's fill our pockets and go and buy things. Don't you forget it won't last after sunset. I wish we'd asked the sammyadd why things don't turn to stone. Perhaps this will. I'll tell you what, there's a pony and cart in the village."

"Do you want to buy that?"

"No, silly, we'll *hire* it, and then we'll go to Rochester and buy heaps and heaps of things. Look here, let's each take as much as we can carry. But it's not sovereigns. They've got a man's head on one side and a thing like the ace of spades on the other. Fill your pockets with it, I tell you, and come along. You can jaw as we go, if you must jaw."

"HE STAGGERED AND HAD TO SIT DOWN AGAIN."

Cyril sat down and began to fill his pockets.

"You made fun of me for getting father to have nine pockets in my Norfolks," said he, "but now you see."

They did. For when Cyril had filled his nine pockets and his handkerchief, and the space between himself and his shirt-front, with the gold coins he tried to stand up. But he staggered and had to sit down again in a hurry.

"Throw out some of the cargo," said Robert. "You'll sink the ship, old chap. That comes of nine pockets."

Then they set off to walk to the village. It was more than a mile, and the road was very dusty indeed, and the sun seemed to get hotter and hotter and the gold in their pockets got heavier and heavier.

It was Jane who said, "I don't see how we're to spend it all. There must be thousands of pounds among the lot of us. I'm going to leave some of mine behind this stump in the hedge, and directly we get to the village we'll buy some biscuits; I know it's long past dinner-time." She took out a handful or two of gold and hid it in the hollows of an old hornbeam. "How round and yellow they are!" she said, "don't you wish they were gingerbread nuts and we were going to eat them?"

"Well, they're not and we're not," said Cyril. "Come on."

But they came on heavily and wearily. Before they reached the village more than one stump in the hedge concealed its little hoard of hidden treasure. Yet they reached the village with about twelve hundred guineas in their pockets. But in spite of this inside wealth they looked quite ordinary outside, and no one would have thought they could have more than half a crown each at the outside. The haze of heat and the blue of the wood smoke made a sort of dim, misty cloud over the red roofs of the village. The four sat down heavily on the first bench they came to in the street. It happened to be outside the Blue Boar Inn.

It was decided that Cyril should go into the Blue Boar and ask for ginger beer, because, as Anthea said, "It is not wrong for men to go into public-houses—only for children. And Cyril is nearer being a man than us, because he is the eldest." So he went. The others sat in the sun and waited.

"Oh, hats, how hot it is!" said Robert. "Dogs put their tongues out when they're hot. I wonder if it would cool us at all to put out ours?"

"We might try," Jane said, and they all put their tongues out as far as ever they could go, so that it quite stretched their throats, but it only seemed to make them thirstier than ever, besides annoying everyone who went by. So they took their tongues in again just as Cyril came back with ginger beer.

"I had to pay for it out of my own two-

"THEY ALL PUT THEIR TONGUES OUT." H. R. MILLAR, del.

and-sevenpence, though, that I was going to buy rabbits with," he said. "They wouldn't change the gold—and when I pulled out a handful the man just laughed and said it was card-counters. And I got some sponge-cakes, too, out of a glass jar on the bar counter, and some biscuits with caraways in."

The sponge-cakes were both soft and dry—and the biscuits were dry too, and yet soft, which biscuits ought not to be. But the ginger-beer made up for everything.

"It's my turn now to try to buy something with the money," Anthea said. "I'm next eldest. Where is the pony-cart kept?"

It was at the Chequers, and Anthea went in the back way, to the yard, because they all knew that little girls ought not to go into the bars of public-houses. She came out, as she herself said, "pleased but not proud."

"He'll be ready in a brace of shakes, he says," she remarked, "and he's to have one sovereign to drive us in to Rochester and back, besides waiting there till we've got everything we want. I think I managed very well."

"You think yourself jolly clever, I dare say," said Cyril, moodily. "How did you do it?"

"I wasn't jolly clever enough to go taking handfuls of money out of my pocket to make it seem cheap, any way," she retorted. "I just found a young man doing something to a horse's legs with a sponge and a pail, and I held out one sovereign and I said, 'Do yoo know what this is?' He said, 'No,' and he'd call his father. And the old man came and he said it was a spade guinea, and he said, 'Was it my own to do as I liked with?' And I said 'Yes.' And I asked about the pony-cart, and I said he could have the guinea if he'd drive us into Rochester, and he said, 'Right, oh!'"

It was a new sensation to be driven in a smart pony-cart along pretty country roads. It was very pleasant, too (which is not always the case with new sensations), quite apart from the beautiful plans of spending the money which each child made as they went along—silently, of course, and quite to itself, for they felt it would never have done to let the old innkeeper hear them talk in the affluent sort of way they were thinking in. The old man put them down by the bridge at their request.

"If you were going to buy a carriage and horses, where would you go?" asked Cyril, as if he were only asking for the sake of something to say.

"Billy Peasemarsh, at the Saracen's Head," said the old man, promptly. "Though all forbid I should recommend any man where it's a question of horses, no more than I'd take anybody else's recommending if I was buying one. But if your pa's thinking of a turn-out of any sort, there ain't a straighter man in Rochester nor a civiller spoken than Billy, though I says it."

"Thank you," said Cyril. "The Saracen's Head."

And now the children began to see one of the laws of Nature turn upside down and stand on its head like an acrobat. Any grown up person would tell you that money is hard to get and easy to spend. But the fairy money had been easy to get, and spending it was not only hard, it was almost impossible. The tradespeople of Rochester seemed to shrink to a tradesperson from the glittering fairy gold ("furrin money" they called it, for the most part). To begin with, Anthea, who had had the misfortune to sit on her hat earlier in the day, wished to buy another. She chose a very beautiful one trimmed with pink roses and the blue breasts of peacocks. It was marked in the window, "Paris model, three guineas."

"I'm glad," she said, "because if it says guineas it means guineas, and not sovereigns, which we haven't got."

But when she took three of the spade guineas in her hand, which was by this time rather dirty owing to her not having put on gloves before going to the gravel-pit, the black silk young lady in the shop looked very hard at her, and went and whispered something to an older lady, also in black silk, and then they gave her back the money and said it was not current coin.

"It's good money, and it says guineas on the hat," said Anthea, "and it's my own."

"I dare say," said the lady, "but it's not the kind of money that's fashionable now, and we don't care about taking it."

"I believe they think we've stolen it," said Anthea, rejoining the others in the street, "if we had gloves they wouldn't think we were so dishonest. It's my hands being so dirty fills their minds with doubts."

So they chose a humble shop, and the girls bought cotton gloves, the kind at sixpence-three-farthings, but when they offered a guinea in payment the woman looked at it through her spectacles and said she had no change, so the gloves had to be paid for out of what was left of Cyril's two-and-sevenpence that he meant to buy rabbits with, and so had the green imitation

crocodile skin purse at ninepence halfpenny which had been bought at the same time. They tried several more shops, the kinds where you buy toys, and scent, and silk handkerchiefs, and books, and fancy boxes of stationery, and photographs of objects of interest in the vicinity. But nobody cared to change a guinea that day in Rochester, and as they went from shop to shop they got dirtier and dirtier, and their hair got more and more untidy, and Jane slipped and fell down on a part of the road where a water cart had just gone by. Also they got very hungry, but they found no one would give them anything to eat for their guineas. After trying two pastry cooks in vain, they became so hungry, perhaps from the smell of the cake in the shop, as Cyril suggested, that they formed a plan of campaign in whispers and carried it out in desperation. They marched into a third pastry cook's—Beale, his name was—and before the people behind the counter could interfere each child had seized three new penny buns, clapped the three together between its dirty hands, and taken a big bite out of the triple sandwich. Then they stood at bay, with the twelve buns in their hands and their mouths very full indeed. The shocked pastry cook bounded round the counter.

"Here," said Cyril, speaking as distinctly as he could and holding out the guinea he had got ready before entering the shop, "pay yourself out of that."

Mr Beale snatched the coin, bit it, and put it in his pocket.

"Off you go," he said, brief and stern, like the man in the song.

"But the change," said Anthea, who had a saving mind.

"Change!" said the man, "I'll change you! Hout you goes, and you may think yourselves lucky I don't send for the police to find out where you got it."

In the Castle gardens the millionaires finished the buns, and though the currant softness of these was delicious, and acted like a charm in raising the spirits of the party, yet even the stoutest heart quailed at the thought of venturing to sound Mr. Billy Peasemarsh at the Saracen's Head on the subject of a horse and carriage. The boys would have given up the idea, but Jane was always a hopeful child and Anthea generally an obstinate one, and their earnestness prevailed.

The whole party, by this time indescribably dirty, therefore betook itself to the Saracen's. The yard-method of attack having been successful at the Chequers, it was tried again here. Mr Peasemarsh was in the yard, and Robert opened the business in these terms —

"They tell me you have a lot of horses and carriages to sell." It had been agreed that Robert should be spokesman, because in books it is always gentlemen who buy horses and not ladies, and Cyril had had his go at the Blue Boar.

"They tell you true, young officer," said Mr. Peasemarsh. He was a long, lean man, with very blue eyes and a tight mouth and narrow lips.

"We should like to buy some, please," said Robert, politely.

"I dare say you would."

"MR BEALE SNATCHED THE COIN AND BIT IT"

"Will you show us a few, please, to choose from?"

"Who are you a-kiddin' of?" inquired Mr. Billy Peasemarsh. "Was you sent here of a message?"

"I tell you," said Robert, "we want to buy some horses and carriages, and a man told us you were straight and civil spoken, but I shouldn't wonder if he was mistaken."

"Upon my sacred," said Mr Peasemarsh "Shall I trot the whole stable out for your honour's worship to see? Or shall I send round to the Bishop's to see if he's a nag or so to dispose of?"

"Please do," said Robert, "if it's not too much trouble. It would be very kind of you."

Mr Peasemarsh put his hands in his pockets and laughed, and they did not like the way he did it. Then he shouted, "Willum."

A stooping ostler appeared in a stable-door

"Here, Willum, come and look at this 'ere young dook, wants to buy the whole stud, lock, stock, and barr'l! And ain't got tuppence in his pocket to bless hisself with, I'll go bail."

Willum's eyes followed his master's pointing thumb with contemptuous interest

"Do 'e, for sure?" he said.

But Robert spoke, though both the girls were now pulling at his jacket and begging him to "come along." He spoke and he was very angry; he said:—

"I'm not a young duke, and I never pretended to be. And as for tuppence—what do you call this?" And before the others could stop him he had pulled out two fat handfuls of shining guineas and held them out for Mr Peasemarsh to look at. He did look. He snatched one up in his finger and thumb. He bit it, and Jane expected him to say, "The best horse in my stables is at your service." But the others knew better. Still, it was a blow, even to the most desponding, when he said, shortly:—

"Willum, shut the yard doors"; and Willum grinned and went to shut them.

"Good afternoon," said Robert, hastily, "we sha'n't buy any of your horses now, whatever you say, and I hope it'll be a lesson to you." He had seen a little side gate open and was moving towards it as he spoke. But Billy Peasemarsh put himself in the way.

"Not so fast, you young off scouring," he said. "Willum, fetch the pleece."

Willum went. The children stood huddled together like frightened sheep, and Mr Peasemarsh spoke to them till the "pleece" arrived. He said many things. Among other things he said:—

"Nice lot you are, aren't you, coming tempting honest men with your guineas?"

"They *are* our guineas," said Cyril, boldly

"Oh, of course, we don't know all about that, no more we don't. Oh, no, course not. And dragging little gells into it, too 'Ere—I'll let the gells go if you'll come along to the pleece quiet."

"We won't *be* let go," said Jane, heroically, "not without the boys. It's our money just as much as theirs, you wicked old man."

"Where'd you get it, then?" said the man, softening slightly.

Jane cast a silent glance of agony at the others

"Lost your tongue, eh? Got it fast enough when it's for calling names with. Come, speak up. Where'd you get it?"

"Out of the gravel pit," said truthful Jane.

"Next article," said the man

"I tell you we did," Jane said. "There's a fairy there—all over brown fur—with ears like bats and eyes like snails, and it gives you a wish a day, and they all come true."

"Touched in the head, eh?" said the man, in a low voice, "all the more shame to you boys dragging the poor afflicted child into your sinful burglaries."

"She's not mad, it's true," said Anthea, "there *is* a fairy. If I ever see it again I'll wish for something for you—at least, I would if vengeance wasn't wicked, so there!"

"Lor' lummee," said Billy Peasemarsh, "if there ain't another on 'em!"

And now Willum came back, with a spiteful grin on his face and at his back the policeman, with whom Mr Peasemarsh spoke long in a hoarse, earnest whisper

"I dare say you're right," said the policeman at last. "Any way, I'll take 'em up on a charge of unlawful possession pending inquiries, and the magistrate will deal with the case. Send the afflicted ones to a home, as likely as not, and the boys to a reformatory. Now, then, come along, youngsters. No use making a fuss. You bring the gells along, Mr Peasemarsh, sir, and I'll shepherd the boys."

Speechless with rage and horror, the four children were driven along the streets of Rochester. Tears of anger and shame blinded them, so that when Cyril ran right into a passer-by he did not recognise her till a well-known voice said, "Well, if ever I did! Oh, Master Robert, whatever have you been a-doing of now?" And another voice, quite as well known, said, "Panty! Want go own Panty!"

They had run into Martha and the baby. Martha behaved admirably. She refused to believe a word of the policeman's story or Mr Peasemarsh's either, even when they made Robert turn out his pockets in an

'THEY HAD RUN INTO MARTHA AND THE BABY'

archway and show the guineas.

"I don't see nothing,' she said. "You've gone out of your senses, you two. There ain't any gold there, only the poor child's hands, all over crock and dirt and like the very chumbley. Oh, that I should ever see the day!"

And the children thought this very noble of Martha, even if rather wicked, till they remembered how the fairy had promised that the servants should never notice any of the fairy gifts. So, of course, Martha couldn't see the gold, and so was only speaking the truth, and that was quite right, of course, but not extra noble.

It was getting dusk when they reached the police station. The policeman told his tale to a sergeant, who sat in a large, bare room with a thing like a clumsy nursery fender at one end to put prisoners in. Jane wondered whether it was a cell or a dock.

"Produce the coins, officer," said the sergeant.

"Turn out your pockets," said the constable.

Cyril desperately plunged his hands in his pockets, stood still a moment, and then began to laugh an odd sort of laugh, that hurt and that felt much more like crying. His pockets were empty. So were the pockets of the others. For, of course, at sunset all the fairy gold had vanished away.

"Turn out your pockets and stop that noise," said the sergeant.

Cyril turned out his pockets, every one of the nine which enriched his Norfolk suit. And every pocket was empty.

"Well?" said the sergeant.

"I don't know how they dona it—artful little beggars. They walked in front of me the 'ole way, so as for me to keep my eye on them and not to attract a crowd and obstruct the traffic."

"It's very remarkable," said the sergeant, frowning.

"If you've quite done brow-beating of the innocent children," said Martha, "I'll hire a private carriage, and we'll drive home to their papa's mansion. You'll hear about this again, young man. I told you they hadn't got any gold, when you were pretending to see it in their poor, helpless hands. It's early in the day for a constable on duty not to be able to trust his own eyes. As to the other one, he keeps the Saracen's Head."

"Take them away, for goodness' sake," said the sergeant, crossly. But as they left the police-station he said, "Now, then," to the policeman and Mr Peasemarsh, and he said it twenty times as crossly as he had spoken to Martha.

Martha was as good as her word. She

took them home in a very grand carriage, because the carriet's cart was gone, and though she had stood by them so nobly with the police she was so angry with them as soon as they were alone, for "trapseing into Rochester by themselves," that none of them dared to mention the old man with the pony-cart from the village, who was waiting for them in Rochester.

"HE SAID, 'NOW, THEN, TO THE POLICEMAN AND MR. PEASEMARSH.'"

And so, after one day of boundless wealth, the children found themselves sent to bed in deep disgrace, and only enriched by two pairs of cotton gloves, dirty inside because of the state of the hands they had been put on to cover, an imitation crocodile-skin purse, and twelve penny buns, long since digested.

The thing that troubled them most next day was the fear that the old gentleman's guinea might have disappeared at sunset with all the rest, so they went down to the village next day to apologize for not meeting him in Rochester and to *see*. They found him very friendly. The guinea had *not* disappeared, and he had bored a hole in it and hung it on his watch chain. As for the guinea the baker took, the children felt they *could* not care whether it had vanished or not, which was not perhaps very honest, but, on the other hand, was not wholly unnatural. But afterwards this preyed on Anthea's mind, and at last she secretly sent twelve stamps by post to "Mr. Beale, Baker, Rochester." Inside she wrote: "To pay for the buns." I hope the guinea did disappear, for that pastry-cook was really not at all a nice man.

The Psammead, or the Sand-fairy

By E. Nesbit.

III.—BEING WANTED

THE morning after the children had been the possessors of boundless wealth, and had been unable to buy anything really useful or enjoyable with it, except two pairs of cotton gloves, twelve penny buns, an imitation crocodile-skin purse, and a ride in a pony cart, they awoke without any of the enthusiastic happiness which they had felt on the previous day, when they remembered how they had had the luck to find a psammead, or sand-fairy, and to receive its promise to grant them a new wish every day. For now they had had two wishes, beauty and wealth, and neither had exactly made them happy. But the happening of strange things, even if they are not completely pleasant things, is more amusing than those times when nothing happens but meals, and they are not always completely pleasant, especially on the days when it is cold mutton or hash.

It had been decided that fifty pounds in two-shilling pieces was the right wish to have this morning. And the lucky children, who could have anything in the wide world by just wishing for it, hurriedly started for the gravel-pit to express their wishes to the psammead. Martha caught them at the gate and insisted on their taking the baby with them.

"Not want him, indeed! Why, everybody 'ud want him—a duck—with all their hearts, they would. And you know you promised your ma to take him out every blessed day," said Martha.

"I know we did," said Robert, in gloom, "but I wish the Lamb wasn't quite so young and small. It would be much better fun taking him out."

"He'll mend of his youngness with time," said Martha; "and, as for smallness, I don't think you'd fancy carrying of him any more, however big he was. Besides, he can walk a bit, bless his precious fat legs—a ducky! He feels the benefit of the new-laid air, so he does—a pet!"

With this and a kiss she plumped the

Lamb into Anthea's arms and went back to her sewing-machine.

The Lamb laughed with pleasure and said, "Walky wif Panty," rode on Robert's back with yells of joy, tried to feed Jane with stones, and altogether made himself so agreeable that nobody could long be sorry that he was of the party.

It was settled that, as soon as they had wished for the money and got it, they would get Mr. Crispin to drive them in to Rochester again, taking the Lamb with them, if they could not get out of it. And they would make a list of the things they really wanted before they started. Full of high hopes and excellent resolutions, they went round the safe, slow cart-road to the gravel-pits, and as they went in between the mounds of gravel a sudden thought came to them, and would have turned their ruddy cheeks pale if they had been children in a book. Being real live children, it only made them stop and look at each other with rather blank and silly expressions. For now they remembered that yesterday, when they had asked the psammead for boundless wealth, and it was getting ready to fill the quarry with the minted gold of bright guineas—millions of them—it had told the children to run along outside the quarry for fear they should be buried alive in the heavy splendid treasure. And they had run. And so it had happened that they had not had time to mark the spot where the psammead was, with a ring of stones, as before. And it was this thought that put such silly expressions on their faces.

"Never mind," said the hopeful Jane, "we'll soon find him."

But this, though easily said, was hard in the doing. They looked and they looked, and though they found their seaside spades, nowhere could they find the sand-fairy.

At last they had to sit down and rest—not at all because they were weary or disheartened, of course, but because the Lamb insisted on being put down—and you cannot look very carefully after anything you may have happened to lose in the sand if you have an active baby to look after at the same time. Get someone to drop your best knife in the sand next time you go to the seaside, and then take your baby brother with you when you go to look for it, and you will see that I am right.

The Lamb, as Martha had said, was feeling the benefit of the country air, and he was as frisky as a sandhopper. The elder ones longed to go on talking about the new wishes they would have when (or if) they found the psammead again. But the Lamb wished to enjoy himself.

He watched his opportunity and threw a handful of sand into Anthea's face, and then suddenly burrowed his own head in the sand and waved his fat legs in the air. Then, of course, the sand got into his eyes, as it had into Anthea's, and he howled.

The thoughtful Robert had brought one solid brown bottle of ginger-beer with him, relying on a thirst that had never yet failed him. This had to be uncorked hurriedly, it was the only wet thing within reach, and it was necessary to wash the sand out of the Lamb's eyes somehow. Of course, the ginger hurt horribly, and he howled more than ever. And amid his anguish of kicking the bottle was upset, and the beautiful ginger-beer frothed out into the sand and was lost for ever.

It was then that Robert, usually a very patient brother, so far forgot himself as to say:—

"Anybody would want him, indeed! Only they don't. Martha doesn't, not really, or she'd jolly well keep him with her. He's a little nuisance, that's what he is. It's too bad. I only wish everybody *did* want him with all their hearts, we might get some peace in our lives."

The Lamb stopped howling now, because Jane had suddenly remembered that there is only one safe way of taking things out of little children's eyes, and that is with your own soft, wet tongue. It is quite easy, if you love the baby as much as you ought to.

Then there was a little silence. Robert was not proud of himself for having been so cross, and the others were not proud of him either. You often notice that sort of silence when someone has said something it ought not to, and everyone else holds its tongue and waits for the one who oughtn't to have to say it is sorry.

The silence was broken by a sigh—a breath suddenly let out. The children's heads turned as if there had been a string tied to each nose and someone had pulled all the strings at once.

And everyone saw the sand-fairy sitting quite close to them, with something as much like a smile as it could manage on its hairy face.

"Good morning," it said, "I did that quite easily. Everyone wants him now."

"It doesn't matter," said Robert, sulkily, because he knew he had been behaving rather like a pig. "No matter who wants him, there's no one here to, anyhow."

"Ingratitude," said the psammesd, "is a dreadful vice."

"We're not ungrateful," Jane made haste to say, "but we didn't *really* want that wish Robert only just said it. Can't you take it back and give us a new one?"

"No; I can't," the sand-fairy said, shortly. "Chopping and changing—it's not business. You ought to be careful what you *do* wish."

"'POOF, POOF, POOF-Y,' HE SAID, AND MADE A GRAB."

Suddenly the Lamb perceived that something brown and furry was near him.

"Poof, poof, poof-y," he said, and made a grab.

"It's not a pussy," Anthea was beginning, when the sand-fairy leaped back.

"Oh, my left whisker!" it said; "don't let him touch me. He's wet."

Its fur stood on end with horror; and, indeed, a good deal of the ginger-beer had been spilt on the blue smock of the Lamb.

The psammesd dug with its hands and feet and vanished in an instant amid a whirl of sand.

The children marked the spot with a ring of stones.

"We may as well get along home," said Robert. "I say, I'm sorry, but, anyway, if it's no good it's no harm, and we know where the sandy thing is for to-morrow."

The others were noble. No one reproached Robert at all. Cyril picked up the Lamb, who was now quite himself again, and off they went by the safe cart-road.

The cart-road from the gravel-pits joins the road almost directly.

At the gate into the road the party stopped to shift the Lamb from Cyril's back to Robert's. And as they paused a very smart open carriage came in sight, with a coachman and a groom on the box, and inside the carriage a lady—very grand indeed, with a dress all white lace and red ribbons, and a parasol all red and white—and a white fluffy dog on her lap, with a red ribbon round its neck. She looked at the children, and particularly at the baby, and she smiled at him. The children were used to this, for the Lamb was, as all the servants said, "a very taking child." So they waved their hands politely to the lady and expected her to drive on. But she did not. Instead, she made the coachman stop. And she beckoned to Cyril, and when he went up to the carriage she said—

"What a dear, darling duck of a baby! Oh, I *should* so like to adopt it. Do you think its mother would mind?"

"She'd mind very much indeed," said Anthea.

"Oh, but I should bring it up in luxury, you know. I am Lady Chittenden. You must have seen my photograph in the illustrated papers. They call me a beauty, you know, but, of course, that's all nonsense. Anyway——"

She opened the carriage door and jumped out. She had the wonderfullest red, high heeled shoes with silver buckles. "Let me hold him a minute," she said. And she took the Lamb and held him very awkwardly, as if she were not used to babies.

Then, suddenly, she jumped into the carriage with the Lamb in her arms and slammed the door, and said "Drive on."

The Lamb roared, the little white dog barked, and the coachman hesitated.

"Drive on, I tell you," said the lady. And the coachman did, for, as he said afterwards, it was as much as his place was worth not to.

The four children looked at each other, and then with one accord they rushed after the carriage and held on behind. Down the dusty road went the smart carriage, and after it, at double quick time, ran the twinkling legs of the Lamb's brothers and sisters.

The Lamb howled louder and louder, but presently his howls changed to hiccuppy gurgles, and then all was still, and they knew he had gone to sleep.

The carriage went on, and the eight feet that twinkled through the dust were growing quite stiff and tired before the carriage stopped at the lodge of a grand park. The children crouched down behind the carriage and the lady got out. She looked at the baby as it lay on the carriage seat, and hesitated.

"The darling, I won't disturb it," she said, and went into the lodge to talk to the woman there about a sitting of Buff Orpington eggs.

The coachman and footman sprang from the box and bent over the still sleeping Lamb.

"AT DOUBLE QUICK TIME, RAN THE TWINKLING LEGS OF THE LAMB'S BROTHERS AND SISTERS"

"Fine boy; wish he was mine," said the coachman.

"He wouldn't favour *you* much," said the groom; "too 'andsome."

"Wonder at her now, I do, really. Hates kids, got none of her own, and can't abide other folkses."

The children crouching in the white dust under the carriage exchanged uncomfortable glances.

"Tell you what," said the coachman, firmly. "Blowed if I don't hide the little nipper in the hedge and tell her his brother's took 'im! Then I'll come back for him afterwards."

"No, you don't," said the footman. "I've took to that kid so as never was. If anyone's to have him, it's me, so there."

"Stow your gab," the coachman rejoined. "You don't want no kids, and if you did one kid's the same as another to you. But I'm a married man and a judge of breed. I knows a first-rate yearling when I sees him. I'm a-goin' to 'ave him, an' least said soonest mended."

"I should 'a' thought," said the footman, sneeringly, "you'd a'most enough. Alfred, an' Albert, an' Louise, an' Victor Stanley, an' Helena Beatrice, an' another— —"

The coachman hit the footman in the chin, the footman hit the coachman in the waistcoat, and next minute the two were fighting here and there, in and out, up and down, and all over everywhere, and the little dog jumped on the box of the carriage and began barking like mad.

Cyril, still crouching in the dust, waddled on bent legs to the side of the carriage farthest from the battlefield. He unfastened the door of the carriage—the two men were far too much occupied with their quarrel to notice anything—took the Lamb in his arms, and, still stooping, carried the sleeping baby a dozen yards along the road to where a stile led into a wood. The others followed, and there among the hazels and young oaks and sweet chestnuts, covered by high, strong-scented bracken, they all lay hidden, till the angry voices of the men were hushed at the angry voice of the red and white lady, and, after a

"THE NEXT MINUTE THE TWO WERE FIGHTING HERE AND THERE."

long and anxious search, the carriage at last drove away.

"My only hat!" said Cyril, drawing a deep breath, as the sound of wheels at last died away; "everyone *does* want him now, and no mistake. That sammyadd has done us again! Tricky brute. For any sake let's get the kid safe home."

So they peeped out, and finding on the right hand only lonely white road, and nothing but lonely white road on the left, they took courage and the road, Anthea carrying the sleeping Lamb.

Adventures dogged their footsteps. A boy with a bundle of fagots on his back dropped his bundle by the roadside and asked to look at the baby, and then offered to carry him, but Anthea was not to be caught that way twice. They all walked on, but the boy followed, and Cyril and Robert couldn't make him go away till they had more than once invited him to smell their fists. Then a little girl in a blue and white checked pinafore actually followed them for a quarter of a mile crying for "the precious baby," and then she was only got rid of by threats of tying her to a tree in the wood with all their pocket handkerchiefs. "So that the bears can come and eat you as soon as it gets dark," said Cyril, severely. Then she went off crying. It presently seemed wise to the brothers and sisters of the baby who was wanted by everyone to hide in the hedge whenever they saw anyone coming, and thus they managed to prevent the Lamb from arousing the inconvenient affection of a milkman, a stone-breaker, and a man who drove a cart with a paraffin barrel at the back of it. They were nearly home when the worst thing of all happened. Turning a corner suddenly they came upon two vans, a tent, and a company of gipsies encamped by the side of the road. The vans were hung all round with wicker chairs and cradles and flower stands and feather brushes. A lot of ragged children were industriously making dust pies in the road, two men lay on the grass smoking, and three women were doing the family washing in an old red watering-can with the top broken off.

In a moment every gipsy, men, women, and children, surrounded Anthea and the baby.

"Let me hold him, little lady," said one of the gipsy women, who had a mahogany coloured face and light hair. "I won't hurt a hair of his head, the little picture."

"I'd rather not," said Anthea.

"Let *me* have him," said the other woman, whose face was also mahogany and her hair jet black, in greasy curls. "I've nineteen of my own, so I have——"

"No," said Anthea, bravely; but her heart beat so that it nearly choked her.

Then one of the men pushed forward.

"'Swelp me if it ain't," he cried, "my own long-lost cheild! Have he a strawberry mark on his left ear? No? Then he's my own bahby, stolen from me in hinnocent hinfancy. 'And 'im over, and we'll not 'ave the law on yer this time."

He snatched the baby from Anthea, who turned scarlet and burst into tears of pure rage.

The others were standing quite still, this

was much the most terrible thing that had ever happened to them. Even being taken up by the police in Rochester was nothing to this. Cyril was quite white and his hands trembled a little, but he made a sign to the others to shut up. He was silent a minute, thinking hard. Then he said:—

"HE SNATCHED THE BABY FROM ANTHEA"

"We don't want to keep him if he's yours. But you see he's used to us. You shall have him if you want him——"

"No, no," cried Anthea—and Cyril glared at her.

"Of course we want him," said the women, trying to get the baby out of the man's arms. The Lamb howled loudly.

"Oh, he's hurt," shrieked Anthea, and Cyril, in a savage undertone, bade her "atow it."

"You trust to me," he whispered. "Look here," he went on, "he's awfully tiresome with people he doesn't know very well. Suppose we stay here a bit till he gets used to you, and then, when it's bed-time, I give you my word of honour we'll go away, and let you keep him if you want to. And then when we're gone you can decide which of you is to have him, as you all want him so much."

"That's fair enough," said the man who was holding the baby, trying to loosen the red neckerchief which the Lamb had caught hold of, and drawn so tight round his mahogany throat that he could hardly breathe. The gipsies whispered together, and Cyril took the chance to whisper too. He said, "Sunset! We'll get away then."

And then his brothers and sisters were filled with wonder and admiration at his having been so clever as to remember this.

"Oh, do let him come to us," said Jane, "see, we'll sit down here, and take care of him for you till he gets used to you."

"What about dinner?" said Robert, suddenly. The others looked at him with scorn.

"Fancy bothering about your beastly dinner when you br—I mean the baby——" Jane whispered, hotly.

Robert carefully winked at her and went on. "You won't mind my just running home to get our dinner," he said to the gipsy. "I can bring it out here in a basket."

His brothers and sisters felt themselves very noble, and despised him. They did not know his thoughtful secret intention. But the gipsies did in a minute.

"Oh, yes," they said, "and then fetch the police, with a pack of lies about it being your baby instead of ours! D'jever catch a weasel asleep?" they asked.

"If you're hungry you can pick a bit along of us," said the light haired gipsy woman, not unkindly. "Here, Levi, that blessed kid'll howl all his buttons off. Give him to the little lady, and let's see if they can't get him used to us a bit."

So the Lamb was handed back, but the gipsies crowded so closely that he could not

possibly stop howling. Then the man with the red handkerchief said:—

"Here, Pharaoh, make up the fire, and you girls see to the pot. Give the kid a chance."

So the gipsies, very much against their will, went off to their work and their children were sent to play, and the Lamb, with his brothers and sisters, was left sitting on the grass.

"He'll be all right at sunset," Jane whispered, "but, oh, it is awful! Suppose they are frightfully angry when they come to their senses! They might beat us, or leave us tied to trees or something."

"No, they won't," Anthea said ("Oh, my Lamb, don't cry any more—it's all right—Panty's got oo, duckie!), "they aren't unkind people, or they wouldn't be going to give us any dinner."

"Dinner?" said Robert, "I won't touch their nasty dinner. It would choke me!"

The others thought so, too, then. But when the dinner was ready—it turned out to be supper, and happened between four and five—they were all glad enough to take what they could get. It was boiled rabbit, with onions, and some bird rather like a chicken, but stringier about its legs. The Lamb had bread soaked in hot water and brown sugar sprinkled on the top. He liked this very much, and consented to let the two gipsy women feed him with it as he sat on Anthea's lap. All that long, hot afternoon Robert and Cyril and Anthea and Jane had to keep the Lamb amused and happy, while the gipsies looked eagerly on. By the time the shadows grew long and black across the meadows he had really "taken to" the woman with the light hair, and even consented to kiss his hand to the children and to stand up and bow, with his hand on his chest, "like a gentleman," to the two men. The whole gipsy camp was in raptures with him, and his brothers and sisters could not help taking some pleasure in showing off his accomplishments to an audience so interested and enthusiastic. But they longed for sunset.

"We're getting into the habit of longing for sunset," Cyril whispered. "How I do wish we could wish something really sensible, that would be of some use, so that we should be quite sorry when sunset came!"

The shadows got longer and longer, and at last there were no separate shadows any more, but one soft, glowing shadow over everything—for the sun was out of sight behind the hill, but he had not really set yet. The people who make the laws about lighting bicycle lamps are the people who decide when the sun sets.

But the gipsies were getting impatient.

"Now, young 'uns," the red-handkerchief man said, "it's time you were laying of your heads on your pillowses—so it is. The kid's all right and friendly with us now, so you just hand him over and sling that hook o' yours, like you said."

"HE CONSENTED TO LET THE GIPSY WOMAN FEED HIM."

The women and children came crowding round the Lamb, arms were held out, fingers snapped invitingly, friendly faces beamed with admiring smiles, but all failed to tempt the loyal Lamb. He clung with arms and legs to Jane, who happened to be holding

him, and uttered the gloomiest roar of the whole day.

"It's no good," the woman said; "hand the little poppet over, miss. We'll soon quiet him."

And still the sun would not set.

"Tell her about how to put him to bed," whispered Cyril—"anything to gain time; and be ready to bolt when the sun really does make up its silly old mind to set."

"Yes, I'll hand him over in just one minute"—Anthea began talking very fast to gain time—"but do let me just tell you he has a warm bath every night and cold in the morning, and he has a crockery rabbit to go into the warm bath with him, and little Samuel saying his prayers in white china on a red cushion for the cold bath, and he hates you to wash his ears, but you must, and if you let the soap get into his eyes the Lamb——"

"Lamb kyes," said he—he had stopped roaring to listen.

The woman laughed. "As if I'd never bath'd a babby," she said. "Come, give us a hold of him. Come to 'Melia, my precious——"

"G'way, ugsie," replied the Lamb at once.

"Yes, but," Anthea went on, "about his meals; you must let me tell you he has an apple or a banana every morning, and bread and milk for breakfast, and an egg for his tea sometimes, and——"

"I've brought up ten," said the black-ringleted woman. "Come, miss—'and 'im over—I can't bear it no longer. I just must give him a hug."

"We ain't settled yet whose he's to be, Esther," said one of the men.

"It won't be you, Esther, with seven of 'em at your tail a'ready."

"I ain't so sure of that," said Esther's husband.

"And ain't I nobody to have a say neither?" said the husband of 'Melia.

Zillah, the girl, said, "An' me? I'm a single girl—and no one but 'im to look after—I ought to have him."

"Hold yer tongue!"

"Shut your mouth!"

"Don't you show me no more of your impereence!"

Everyone was getting very angry. The dark gipsy faces were frowning and anxious-looking. Suddenly a change swept over them, as if some invisible sponge had wiped away these cross and anxious expressions and left only a blank.

The children saw that the sun really *had* set. But they were afraid to move. And the gipsies were feeling so muddled, because of the invisible sponge that had washed all the feelings of the last few hours out of their hearts, that they could not say a word.

The children hardly dared to breathe. Suppose the gipsies, when they recovered speech, should be furious to think how silly they had been all day.

It was an awkward moment. Suddenly Anthea, greatly daring, held out the Lamb to the red-handkerchief man.

"Here he is," she said.

The man drew back. "I shouldn't like to deprive you, miss," he said, hoarsely.

"Anyone who likes can have my share of him," said the other man.

"After all, I've got enough of my own," said Esther.

"He's a nice little chap," said Amelia. She was the only one who now looked affectionately at the whimpering Lamb.

Zillah said: "If I don't think I must have had a touch of the sun. *I* don't want him."

"Then shall we take him away?" said Anthea.

"Well, suppose you do," said Pharaoh, heartily, "and we'll say no more about it."

And with great haste all the gipsies began to be busy about their tents for the night. All but Amelia. She went with the children as far as the bend in the road, and there she said:—

"Let me give him a kiss, miss, I don't know what made us go for to behave so silly, us gipsies don't steal babies, whatever they may tell you when you're naughty. We've enough of our own, mostly. But I've lost all mine."

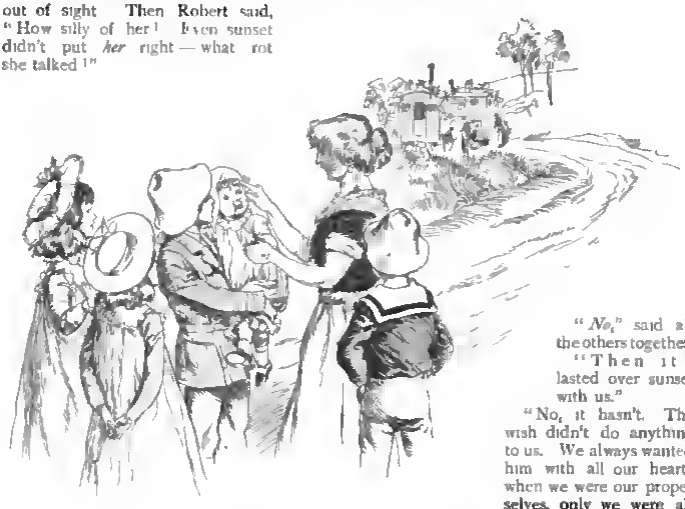
She leaned towards the Lamb, and he, looking in her eyes, unexpectedly put up a grubby, soft paw and stroked her face.

"Poor, poor," said the Lamb. And he let the gipsy woman kiss him, and, what is more, he kissed her brown cheek in return—a very nice kiss, as all his kisses are, and not a wet one, like some babies give. The gipsy woman moved her finger about on his forehead as if she were writing something there, and the same with his chest and his hands and his feet. Then she said:—

"May he be brave, and have the strong head to think with, and the strong heart to love with, and the strong hands to work with, and the strong feet to travel with, and always come safe home to his own." Then she said something in a strange language no one could understand, and suddenly added:—

"Well, I must be saying 'So long'—and glad to have made your acquaintance." And she turned and went back to her home—the tent by the grassy roadside.

The children looked after her till she was out of sight. Then Robert said, "How silly of her! Even sunset didn't put *her* right—what rot she talked!"



"THE GIPSY WOMAN MOVED HER FINGERS ABOUT ON HIS FOREHEAD."

"Well," said Cyril, "if you ask me I think it was rather decent of her."

"Decent?" said Anthea. "It was very nice indeed of her. I think she's a dear."

"She's just too frightfully nice for anything," said Jane.

And they went home—very late for tea, and unspeakably late for dinner. Martha scolded, of course. But the Lamb was safe.

"I say, it turned out we wanted the Lamb as much as anyone," said Robert, after wards.

"Of course."

"But do you feel different about it now the sun's set?"

"*No*," said all the others together. "Then it's lasted over sunset with us."

"No, it hasn't. The wish didn't do anything to us. We always wanted him with all our hearts when we were our proper selves, only we were all pigs this morning, especially you, Robert."

Robert bore this with a strange calm.

"I certainly *thought* I didn't want him this morning," said he. "Perhaps I *was* a pig. But everything looked so different when we thought we were going to lose him."

And that, my dear children, is the moral of this story. Think of it, the next time you feel piggy yourself and want to get rid of any of your brothers and sisters. I hope this doesn't often happen, but I dare say it has happened sometimes, even to you!

By E. Nesbit.

IV.—WINGS.

"LET'S wish for wings," said Anthea, when they had found the psammead, and were ready to have the day's wish.

"Oh, *do* let's," said Jane; "it would be like a bright dream of deliciousness." So the sand-fairy blew itself out, and next moment each child had a funny feeling, half heaviness and half lightness, on its shoulders. The sand-fairy put its head on one side and turned its snail's eyes from one to the other.

"Not such bad wings," it said, "but don't forget they only last till sunset. If you're flying too high when the sun goes down—well, I'll say no more." The wings were very big and gloriously beautiful, for they were soft and smooth, and every feather lay neatly in its place. And the feathers were of the most lovely mixed changing colours, like the rainbow, or iridescent glass, or the beautiful scum that sometimes floats on water that is not at all nice to drink.

"Oh! but can we fly?" Jane said, standing anxiously, first on one foot and then on the other.

"Look out," said Cyril, "you're treading on my wing."

"Does it hurt?" asked Anthea, with interest, but no one answered, for Robert had spread his wings and jumped up, and now he was slowly rising in the air. He looked very awkward in his knickerbocker suit—his boots, in particular, hung helplessly, and seemed much larger than when he was standing in them. But the others cared but little how he looked, or how they looked, for that matter; for now they all spread out their wings and rose in the air. Of course, you all know what flying feels like, because everyone has dreamed about flying, and it seems so beautifully easy, only you never can remember how you did it; and, as a rule, you have to do it without wings in your dreams, which is more clever and uncommon, but not so easy to remember the rule for. Now, the four children rose flapping from the ground, and you can't think how good the air felt running against their faces. Their wings were tremendously wide when they were spread out, and they had to fly quite a long way apart so as not to get in each other's way. But little things like this are easily learned.

All the words in the English dictionary and in the Greek lexicon as well are, I find, of no use at all to tell you exactly what it feels like to be flying, so I will not try; but I will say that to look down on the fields and woods instead of along at them is something like looking at a beautiful live map, where, instead of silly colours on paper, you have real moving sunny fields and woods laid out one after the other. As Cyril said, and I can't think where he got hold of such a strange expression, "It does you a fair treat." It was most wonderful, and more like real magic than any wish the children had had yet. They flapped and flew and sailed on their great rainbow wings, between green earth and blue sky, and they flew right over Rochester and then swerved round towards Maidstone, and presently they all began to feel extremely hungry. Curiously enough, this happened when they were flying rather low, and just as they were crossing an orchard where some early plums shone red and ripe.

They paused on their wings. I cannot explain to you how this is done, but it is something like treading water when you are swimming, and hawks do it extremely well.

"Yes, I dare say," said Cyril, though no one had spoken. "But stealing is stealing even if you've got wings."

"Do you really think so?" said Jane, briskly. "If you've got wings you're a lord, and no one minds birds breaking the Commandments. At least, they may *mind*, but the birds always do it, and no one scolds them or sends them to prison."

It was not so easy to perch on a plum tree as you might think, because the rainbow wings were so *very* large; but somehow they all managed to do it, and the plums were certainly very sweet and juicy.

"THEY FLEW RIGHT OVER ROCHESTER"

Fortunately, it was not till they had all had quite as many plums as were good for them that they saw a stout man, who looked exactly as though he owned the plum-trees, come hurrying through the orchard-gate with a thick stick, and with one accord they disentangled their wings from the plum laden branches and began to fly.

The man stopped short, with his mouth open. For he had seen the boughs of his trees moving and twitching, and he had said to himself, "Them young varmint—at it again!" And he had come out at once—for the lads of the village had taught him in past seasons that plums want looking after. And when he saw the rainbow wings flutter up out of the plum tree he felt that he must have gone quite mad, and he did not like the feeling at all. And when Anthea looked down and saw his mouth go slowly open, and stay so, and his face become green and mauve in patches, she called out: "Don't be frightened," and felt hastily in

her pocket for a threepenny-bit with a hole in it, which she had meant to hang on a ribbon round her neck for luck. She hovered round the unfortunate plum owner, and said: "We have had some of your plums; we thought it wasn't stealing, but now I am not so sure. So here's some money to pay for them."

She swooped down towards the terror-stricken grower of plums and slipped the coin into the pocket of his jacket, and in a few flaps she had re-joined the others.

The farmer sat down on the grass, suddenly and heavily.

"THE FARMER SAT DOWN ON THE GRASS, SUDDENLY"

"Well, I'm blessed!" he said. "This here is what they call delusions, I suppose. But the threepenny"—he pulled it out and bit it—"*that's* real enough. Well, from this day forth I'll be a better man. It's the kind of thing to sober a chap for life, this is. I'm glad it was only wings, though. I'd rather see birds as aren't there and couldn't be, even if they pretend to talk, than some things as I could name."

He got up slowly and heavily and went indoors, and he was so nice to his wife that day that she was quite happy, and said to herself, "Law, whatever have a-come to the man!" and smartened herself up and put a blue ribbon bow at the place where her collar fastened on, and looked so pretty that he was kinder than ever. So perhaps the winged children really did do one good thing that day. If so, it was the only one — for really there is nothing like wings for getting you into trouble. But, if you are in trouble, there is nothing like wings for getting you out of it.

This was the case in the matter of the fierce dog who sprang out at them when they had folded up their wings as small as possible and were going up to a farm door to ask for a crust of bread and cheese, for, in spite of the plums, they were soon just as hungry as ever again.

Now, there is no doubt whatever that if the four had been ordinary wingless children that black and fierce dog would have had a good bite out of the brown-stockinged leg of Robert, who was the nearest. But at its first growl there was a flutter of wings, and the dog was left to strain at his chain and stand on his hind legs as if he were trying to fly too.

They tried several other farms, but at those where there were no dogs the people were far too frightened to do anything but scream; and at last, when it was nearly four o'clock, and their wings were getting miserably stiff and tired, they alighted on a church tower and held a council of war.

"We can't possibly fly all the way home without dinner or tea," said Robert, with desperate decision.

"And nobody will give us any dinner or even lunch, let alone tea," said Cyril.

"Perhaps the clergyman here might," suggested Anthea. "He must know all about angels——"

"Anybody could see we're not that," said

Jane. "Look at Robert's boots and Squirrel's plaid necktie."

"Well," said Cyril, firmly, "if the country you're in won't sell provisions you take them. In wars, I mean. I'm quite certain you do. And even in other stories no good brother would allow his little sisters to starve in the midst of plenty."

"Plenty?" repeated Robert, hungrily; and the others looked vaguely round the bare leads of the church tower, and murmured, "In the midst of?"

"EVERYONE NOW TURNED OUT HIS POCKETS."

"Yes," said Cyril, impressively. "There is a larder window at the side of the clergyman's house, and I saw things to eat inside—custard pudding, and cold chicken and tongue, and pies, and jam. It's rather a high window, but with wings——"

"How clever of you," said Jane.

"Not at all," said Cyril, modestly, "any born general—Napoleon or the Duke of Marlborough—would have seen it just the same as I did."

"It seems very wrong," said Anthea.

"Nonsense," said Cyril. "What was it Sir Philip Sydney said when the soldier wouldn't stand him a drink?—'My necessity is greater than his'"

"We'll club our money, though, and leave it to pay for the things, won't we?" Anthea was persuasive, and very nearly in tears, because it is most trying to feel enormously hungry and unspeakably sinful at one and the same time.

"Some of it," was the cautious reply.

Everyone now turned out his pockets on the lead roof of the tower, where visitors for a couple of hundred years had cut their own and their sweethearts' initials with penknives in the soft lead. There was five and sevenpence halfpenny altogether, and even the upright Anthea admitted that that was too much to pay for four people's dinners. Robert said he thought eighteenpence.

And half a crown was finally agreed to be "handsome."

So Anthea wrote on the back of her last term's report, from which she first tore her own name and that of the school, the following letter—

"Dear Reverend Clergyman,—We are very hungry indeed because of having to fly all day, and we think it is not stealing when you are starving to death. We are afraid to ask you for fear you should say 'no,' because, of course, you know about angels, but you would not think we were angels. We will only take the necessities of life and no pudding or pie, to show you it is not greediness but true starvation that forces us to make your larder stand and deliver. But we are not highwaymen by trade."

"'Cut it short,' said the others with one accord. And Anthea hastily added—

"Our intentions are quite honourable, if you only knew. And here is half a crown to show we are sincere and grateful. Thank you for your kind hospitality.—From Us Four."

The half-crown was wrapped in this letter, and all the children felt that when the clergyman had read it he would understand every

thing as well as anyone could who had not seen the wings.

"Now," said Cyril, "of course, there's some risk, we'd better fly straight down the other side of the tower and then flutter low across the churchyard and in through the shrubbery. There doesn't seem to be anyone about. But you never know. The window looks out into the shrubbery. It is embowered in foliage, like a window in a story. I'll go in and get the things. Robert and Anthea can take them as I hand them out through the window—and Jane can keep watch—her eyes are sharp—and whistle if she sees anyone about. Shut up, Robert; she can whistle quite well enough for that, anyway. It ought not to be a very good whistle—it'll sound more natural and bird like. Now, then—off we go!"

I cannot pretend that stealing is right. I can only say that on this occasion it did not look like stealing to the hungry four, but appeared in the light of a fair and reasonable business transaction. They had never happened to learn that a tongue—hardly cut into—a chicken and a loaf of bread, and a siphon of soda water cannot be bought in shops for half a crown. These were the necessaries of life which Cyril handed out of the larder window when, quite unobserved and without hindrance or adventure, he had led the others to that happy spot. He felt that to refrain from jam, apple turnovers, cake, and mixed candied peel was a really heroic act—and I agree with him. He was also proud of not taking the custard pudding, and there I think he was wrong, because if he had taken it there would have been a difficulty about returning the dish. No one, however starving, has a right to steal china pie dishes with little pink flowers on them. The soda water siphon was different. They could not do without something to drink, and as the maker's name was on it they felt sure it would be returned to him wherever they might leave it. If they had time they would take it back themselves. The man appeared to live in Rochester, which would not be much out of their way home.

Everything was carried up to the top of the tower and laid down on a sheet of kitchen paper which Cyril had found on the top shelf of the larder. As he unfolded it Anthea said, "I don't think *that's* a necessity of life."

"Yes, it is," said he. "We must put the things down somewhere to cut them up, and I heard father say the other day people got diseases from germans in rain water. Now, there must be lots of rain-water here—and when it dries up the germans are left—and they'd get into the things and we should all die of scarlet fever."

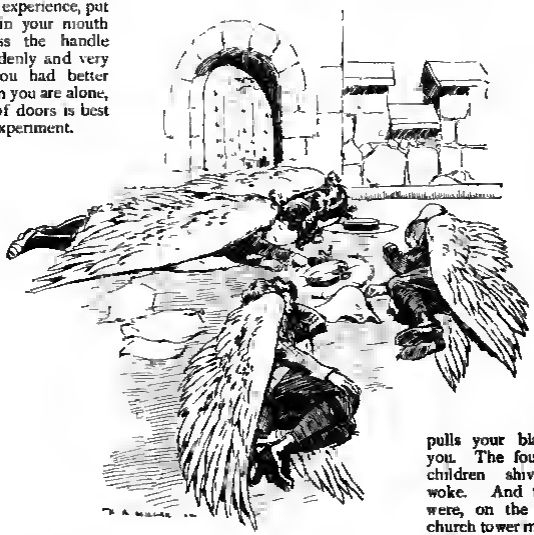
"THESE WERE THE NECESSARIES OF LIFE WHICH CYRIL HANDED OUT OF THE LARDER WINDOW."

"What are germans?"

"Little waggly things you see with microscopes," said Cyril, with a scientific air. "They give you every illness you can think of. I'm sure the paper was a necessary, just as much as the bread and meat and water. Now, then. Oh, my eyes, I am hungry!"

I do not wish to describe the picnic party on the top of the tower. You can imagine well enough what it is like to carve a chicken

and a tongue with a knife that has only one blade—and that snapped off short about half way down. But it was done. Eating with your fingers is greasy and not easy—and paper dishes soon get to look very spotty and horrid. But one thing you can't imagine, and that is how soda-water behaves when you try to drink it straight out of a siphon—especially a quite full one. But if imagination will not help you, experience will, and you can easily try it for yourself, if you can get a grown-up to give you the siphon. If you want to have a really thorough experience, put the tube in your mouth and press the handle very suddenly and very hard. You had better do it when you are alone, and out of doors is best for this experiment.



"THE CHILDREN SLEPT"

When the children had done dinner they grew strangely sleepy, and before it was a quarter of an hour after dinner they had all curled round and tucked themselves up under their large, soft, warm wings and were fast asleep. And the sun was sinking slowly in the west. (I must say it was in the west because it is usual in books to say so, for fear careless people should think it was setting in the east. In point of fact it was not exactly in the west either, but that's near enough.) The sun, I repeat, was sinking slowly in the west, and the children slept warmly and happily on, for wings are cosier than eider-down quilts to sleep under. The shadow of the church tower fell across the churchyard and across the vicarage and across the field beyond, and presently there were no more shadows—and the sun had set and the wings were gone. And still the children slept—but not for long. Twilight is very beautiful, but it is chilly, and you know, however sleepy you are, you wake up soon enough if your brother or sister happens to be up first and pulls your blankets off you. The four wingless children shivered and woke. And there they were, on the top of a church tower in the dusky twilight, with blue stars coming out by ones and twos and tens and twenties over their heads—miles away from home, with three and three half-pence in their pockets, and a doubtful act about the necessities of life to be accounted for if anyone found them with the soda-water siphon.

They looked at each other. Cyril spoke first, picking up the siphon:—

"We'd better get along down and get rid of this beastly thing. It's dark enough to leave it on the clergyman's doorstep, I should think. Come on."

There was a little turret at the corner of

the tower, and the little turret had a door in it. They had noticed this when they were eating, but had not explored it, as you would have done in their place. Because, of course, when you have wings and can explore the whole sky, doors seem hardly worth exploring.

Now they turned towards it.

"Of course," said Cyril, "this is the way down."

It was. But the door was locked on the inside!

And the world was growing darker and darker. And they were miles from home. And there was the soda-water siphon.

I shall not tell you whether anyone cried, nor, if so, how many cried, nor who cried. You will be better employed in making up your minds what you would have done if you had been in their place.

When they grew calmer Anthea put her handkerchief in her pocket and her arm round Jane and said —

"It can't be for more than one night. We can signal with our handkerchiefs in the morning. They'll be dry then. And someone will come up and let us out——"

"And find the siphon," said Cyril, gloomily, "and we shall be sent to prison for stealing."

"You said it wasn't stealing; you said you were sure it wasn't."

"I'm not sure *now*," said Cyril, shortly.

"Let's throw the beastly thing slap away among the trees," said Robert, "then no one can do anything to us."

"Oh, yes"—Cyril's laugh was not a light-hearted one—"and hit some chap on the head and be murderers as well as—as the other thing."

There was a pause. Then Cyril said, slowly: "Look here; we must risk that siphon. I'll button it up inside my jacket; perhaps no one will notice it. You others keep well in front of me. There are lights in the clergyman's house. They've not gone to bed yet. We must just yell as loud as ever we can. Now, all scream when I say 'three.' Robert, you do the yell like a railway engine, and I'll do the coo-ee like father's. The girls can do as they please. One, two, three!"

A four-fold yell rent the silent peace of the evening, and a maid at one of the vicarage windows paused with her hand on the blind-cord.

"One, two, three!" Another yell, piercing and complex, startled the owls and starlings to a flutter of feathers in the belfry below.

The maid fled from the vicarage windows and ran down the vicarage stairs and into the vicarage kitchen, and fainted as soon as she had explained to the manservant and the cook and the cook's cousin that she had seen a ghost. It was quite untrue, of course, but I suppose the girl's nerves were a little upset by the yelling.

"One, two, three!" The vicar was on his doorstep by this time, and there was no mistaking the yell that greeted him.

"Goodness me," he said to his wife, "my dear, someone's being murdered in the church. Give me my hat and a thick stick and tell Andrew to come after me. I expect it's the lunatic who stole the tongue." And he rushed out, dragging Andrew by the arm.

A volley of yells greeted them. As it died into silence Andrew shouted: "Halloa, you there! Did you call?"

"Yes," shouted four far-away voices.

"They seem to be in the air," said the vicar; "very remarkable."

"Where are you?" shouted Andrew, and Cyril replied in his deepest voice, very slow and loud:—

"Church! Tower! Top!"

"Come down, then," said Andrew. And the voice replied:—

"Can't! Door locked!"

"My goodness!" said the vicar. "Andrew, fetch the stable lantern. Perhaps it would be as well to fetch another man from the village."

So Andrew fetched the lantern and the cook's cousin, and the vicar's wife begged them all to be very careful.

They went across the churchyard—it was quite dark now—and up the tower. And at the top of the tower there was a little door. And the door was bolted on the stair side.

The cook's cousin, who was a gamekeeper, kicked at the door and said —

"Halloa, you there!"

The children were holding on to each other on the farther side of the door and trembling with anxiousness, and very hoarse with their howls. They could hardly speak, but Cyril managed to reply, huskily —

"Halloa, you there!"

"How did you get up there?"

It was no use saying "We flew up," so Cyril said:—

"We got up, and then we found the door was locked and we couldn't get down. Let us out, do——"

"How many of you are there?" asked the keeper.

"Only four," said Cyril.

"Are you armed?"

"Are we what?"

"I've got my gun handy—so you'd best not try any tricks," said the keeper. "If we open the door will you promise to come quietly down, and no nonsense?"

When all the bolts were drawn the keeper spoke deep-chested words through the keyhole.

"I don't open," said he, "till you've gone over to the side of the tower. And if one of you comes at me I fire. Now——"

"We're all over the other side," said the voices.

The keeper felt pleased with himself, and owned himself a bold man when he threw open that door and, stepping out on to the leads, flashed the full light of the stable lantern on to the group of desperadoes standing against the parapet on the other side of the tower.

He lowered his gun and he nearly dropped the lantern.

"So help me," he cried, "if they ain't a pack of kiddies!"

The vicar now advanced.

"How did you come here?" he asked, severely. "Tell me at once."

"Oh, take us down," said Jane, catching at his coat, "and we'll tell you anything you like. You won't believe us; but it doesn't matter. Oh, take us down!"

So they were taken down and all marched into the vicarage study, and the vicar's wife came rushing in.

The vicar had sunk into a chair, overcome by emotion and amazement.

"But how did you come to be locked up in the church tower?" asked the vicar.

"We went up," said Robert, slowly, "and we were tired, and we all went to sleep, and when we woke up we found the door was locked, so we yelled."

"THE KEEPER SPOKE DEEP-CHESTED WORDS THROUGH THE KEYHOLE."

"I should think you did," said the vicar's wife, "frightening everybody out of their wits like this! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

"We *are*," said Jane, gently.

"But who locked the door?" asked the vicar.

"I don't know at all," said Robert, with perfect truth; "do, please, send us home."

"Well, really," said the vicar, "I suppose we'd better. Andrew, put the horse to, and you can take them home."

So you see they got off better than they deserved. Only Martha was very angry and swept them to bed in a whirlwind of reproaches. And they were condemned to spend the next day indoors. Only Robert—but that belongs to the Tale of the Castle.

V.—THE BESIEGED CASTLE

THE others were "kept in." Only Robert was allowed to go out "to get something." This, of course, was a wish from the sand-fairy. There was no time to arrange anything with the others before he went, and when he had found the fairy he found also that he had no ideas. So at last he said—

"Look here, can't you let the others have a wish without their coming here for it? Just make it come true, whatever they wish in the house."

The psammead said "Yes." And Robert tore home, full of sudden anxiousness. Because, of course, the others wouldn't know, and they would very likely say "I wish it was dinner time," or "I wish you wouldn't fidget so," without knowing that it would come true, and then a whole day's wish would be wasted.

He ran as fast as he could, but when he turned the corner that ought to have brought him within sight of the ornamental ironwork on the top of the house he stopped short. There *was* no house, the garden railings were gone, and, yes—the others *had* wished—without any doubt they had. And they must have wished that they lived in a castle. For there the castle stood, black and stately and very tall and broad, with battlements and shot windows and eight great towers, and where the garden and the orchard had been there were white things dotted.

Robert walked slowly on, and as he got nearer he saw that these were tents and men in armour were walking about among the tents—crowds and crowds of them.

"Oh, crikey!" said Robert, fervently. "They *have!* They've wished for a castle and it's being besieged! It's just like that sand-fairy. I wish we'd never seen the beastly thing!"

Two men in steel caps were coming towards him. They had high brown boots on their long legs, and they came towards him with such great strides that Robert remembered the shortness of his own legs and did not run away. He knew it would be useless to himself, and he feared it might be irritating to the foe. So he stood quite still, and the two men seemed quite pleased with him.

"By my halidome," said one, "a brave varlet this."

Robert felt pleased at being *called* brave, and somehow it made him *feel* brave. He passed over the "varlet." It was the way people talked in historical romances for the

young, he knew, and it was evidently not meant for rudeness. He only hoped he would be able to understand what they said to him. He had not been always able to quite follow the conversations in the historical romances for the young.

"His garb is strange," said the other. "Some outlandish treachery, belike."

"Say, lad, what brings thee hither?"

Robert knew this meant, "Now, then, youngster, what are you up to here, eh?" so he said:—

"If you please, I want to go home."

"Go, then!" said the man in the longest boots; "none hindereth and naught lets us to follow. Zooks," he added, in a cautious undertone, "I misdoubt me but he beareth tidings to the besieged."

"Where is thy home, young knave?" inquired the man with the largest steel cap.

"Over there," said Robert, and directly he had said it he knew he ought to have said "Yonder!"

"Ha! sayest so," rejoined the longest boots; "come hither, boy. This is matter for our leader."

And to the leader Robert was dragged forthwith—by the reluctant ear.

The leader was the most glorious creature Robert had ever seen. He had armour, and a helmet, and a horse, and a crest and feathers, and a shield, and a lance, and a sword. His armour and his weapons were all, I am almost sure, of quite different periods. The leader was exactly like the pictures Robert had so often admired in the historical romances. The shield was thirteenth century, while the sword was of the pattern used in the Peninsular War; the cuirass was of the time of Charles I, and the helmet dated from the Second Crusade. The arms on the shield were very grand—three red running lions on a blue ground—the tents were of the latest brand approved by the War Office, and the whole appearance of the camp, army and leader, might have been a shock to some. But Robert was dumb with admiration, and it all seemed to him perfectly correct, because he knew no more of heraldry or archæology than the gifted artists who drew the pictures for the historical romances. The scene was indeed "exactly like a picture." He admired it all so much that he felt braver than ever.

"Come hither, lad," said the glorious leader, when the men in Cromwellian steel caps had said a few low, eager words. And he took off his helmet, because he could not see properly with it on. He had a kind face and long, fair hair. "Have no fear—thou shalt take no scathe."

Robert was glad of that. He wondered what scathe was, and if it was nastier than the senna-tea which he had to take sometimes.

"Unfold thy tale without alarm," said the leader, kindly; "whence comest thou, and what is thine intent?"

"My what?" said Robert.

"ROBERT WAS DRAGGED FORTHWITH—BY THE RELUCTANT EAR"

"What seekest thou to accomplish? What is thine errand, that thou wanderest here alone among these rough men-at-arms? Poor child, thy mother's heart aches for thee e'en now, I'll warrant me."

He wiped away a manly tear, exactly as a leader in an historical romance would have done, and said:—

"Fear not to speak the truth, my child; thou hast naught to fear from Wulfric de Talbot."

Robert had a wild feeling that this glorious leader of the besieging party, being himself part of a wish, would be able to understand better than Martha, or the gipsies, or the policeman in Rochester, or the clergyman of yesterday, the true tale of the wishes and the

"HE WIPED AWAY A MANLY TEAR"

psammead. The only difficulty was that he knew he could never remember enough "quothas" and "beshrew mes" and things like that to make his talk sound like the talk of a boy in an historical romance. However, he began boldly enough with a sentence straight out of "Ralph de Courcy, or, The Boy Crusader." He said:—

"Gramercy for thy courtesy, fair Sir Knight, the fact is, it's like this, and I hope you're not in a hurry, because the story's rather a breather. Father and mother are away, and when we were down playing in the sand pits we found a psammead."

"I cry thee mercy! A sammyadd?" said the Knight.

"Yes—a sort of—of fairy, or enchanter—yes, that's it, an enchanter, and he said we could have a wish every day, and we wished to be beautiful."

"Thy wish was scarce granted," muttered one of the men-at-arms, looking at Robert, who went on as if he had not heard.

"And then we wished for money—treasure, you know—but we couldn't spend it. And yesterday we wished for wings and we got them, and we had a ripping time to begin with——"

"Thy speech is strange and uncouth," said Sir Wulfric de Talbot. "Repeat thy words—what hadst thou?"

"A ripping—I mean a jolly—no—we were contented with our lot, that's what I mean, only after that we got into an awful fix."

"What is a fix? A fray, mayhap?"

"No, not a fray. A—a—a tight place."

"A dungeon? Alas! for thy youthful fettered limbs," said the Knight, politely.

"It wasn't a dungeon. We just encountered undeserved misfortunes," Robert explained. "To-day we are punished by not being allowed to go out." "That's where I live"—he pointed to the castle—"the others are in there, and they're not allowed to go out. It's all the psammead's—I mean the enchanter's—fault. I wish we'd never seen him."

"He is an enchanter of might?"

"Oh, yes—of might and main!"

"And thou deemest that it is the spells of the enchanter whom thou hast angered that have lent strength to the besieging party," said the gallant leader, "but know thou that Wulfric de Talbot needs no enchanter's aid to lead his followers to victory."

"No, I am sure you don't," said Robert, with hasty courtesy; "but all the same it's partly his fault, but we're most to blame. You couldn't have done anything if it hadn't been for us."

"How now, bold boy?" said Sir Wulfric, haughtily, "thy speech is dark and scarce courteous. Unravel me this riddle."

"Oh," said Robert, desperately, "of course you don't know it, but you're not real at all. You're only here because the others must have been idiots enough to wish for a castle, and when the sun sets you'll just vanish away and it'll be all right."

The captain and the men-at-arms exchanged glances—at first pitying, and then sterner as the longest-booted man said:—

"Beware, noble my lord, the urchin but feigns madness to escape from our clutches. Shall we not bind him?"

"I'm no more mad than you are," said Robert, angrily; "only I was an idiot to think you'd understand anything. Let me go—I haven't done anything to you."

"Whither?" asked the Knight, who seemed to have believed all the enchanter's story till it came to his own share in it. "Whither wouldst thou wend?"

"Home, of course." Robert pointed to the castle.

"To carry news of succour? Nay."

"All right, then," said Robert, struck by a sudden idea. "Then let me go somewhere else." His mind sought eagerly among the memories of the historical romance.

"Sir Wulfric de Talbot," he said, slowly, "should think foul scorn to—to keep a chap—I mean one who has done him no hurt—when he wants to cut off quietly—I mean to depart without violence."

"This to my face? Beshrew thee for a knave!" replied Sir Wulfric. Yet the appeal seemed to have gone home. "But thou sayest sooth. Go where thou wilt," he added, nobly, "thou art free. Wulfric de Talbot warreth not with babes. And Jakin here shall bear thee company."

"All right," said Robert, wildly. "Jakin will enjoy himself, I think. Come on, Jakin. Sir Wulfric, I salute thee."

He saluted after the modern military manner, and set off running to the sand pit, Jakin's long boots keeping up easily. He found the fairy. He dug it up, he woke it up. He implored it to give him one more wish.

"I've done two to-day already," it grumbled, "and one was as stiff a bit of work as ever I did."

"Oh, do, do, do, do, *do*!" said Robert, while Jakin looked on with an expression of open-mouthed horror at the strange beast that talked and gazed with snails' eyes at him.

"Well, what is it?" snapped the psammead, with cross sleepiness.

"I wish I was with the others," said Robert. And the psammead began to swell. Robert lost consciousness for an instant. When he opened his eyes the others were crowding round him in a dark room, with thick stone walls and no furniture.

"We never heard you come in," they said. "How awfully jolly of you to wish it to give us our wish!"

"Of course, we understood that was what you'd done."

"But you ought to have told us. Suppose we'd wished something silly?"

"Silly?" said Robert, very crossly, indeed. "How

"'Oh, do, do, do, do, do!' said Robert."

much sillier could you have been, I'd like to know? You nearly settled me, I can tell you."

Then he told his story, and the others admitted that it certainly had been rough on him. And they praised his courage and cleverness so much that he presently got back his lost temper and felt braver than ever and consented to be captain of the besieged force.

"We haven't done anything yet," said Anthea, comfortably; "we waited for you. We've collected a lot of daggers and stones and we're going to shoot at them through these little loopholes with the bow and arrows uncle gave you, and you shall have first shot."

"I don't think I'd begin," said Robert, cautiously. "You don't know how real they are. They won't attack till sunset, I heard Jakin say so. We can spend the day getting ready for the defence."

They explored the castle thoroughly—and really the day passed very pleasantly. It was hard to believe that there could be real danger. It was in the afternoon that they happened to be on the highest tower, whence they could see all round the castle, and could see, too, that beyond the moat on every side the tents of the besieging party were pitched. Rather uncomfortable shivers ran down the children's backs as they saw that all the men were very busy cleaning or sharpening their arms, restringing their bows, and polishing their shields. A large party came along the road with horses dragging along the great trunk of a tree, and Cyril felt quite pale because he knew this was for a battering ram.

"What a good thing we've got a moat," he said, "and what a good thing the drawbridge is up! I should never have known how to work it."

"Of course it would be up in a besieged castle."

"You'd think there ought to have been soldiers in it, wouldn't you?" said Robert.

"You see, you don't know how long it's been besieged," said Cyril, darkly. "Perhaps most of the brave defenders were killed quite early in the siege and all the provisions eaten, and now there are only a few intrepid survivors—that's us—and we are going to defend it to the death."

"How do you begin? Defending to the death, I mean?" asked Anthea.

"We ought to be heavily armed, and then shoot at them when they advance to the attack, and drop stones on them, and daggers."

"They used to pour boiling lead down on besiegers when they got too close," said Anthea. "Father showed me the holes on purpose for pouring it down through at Bodiam Castle. And there are holes like it in the gate-tower here."

"I think I'm glad it's only a game. It *is* only a game, isn't it?" said Jane.

But no one had time to answer.

For suddenly there came the loud, fierce cry of a trumpet.

"You see it *is* real," said Robert, "and they are going to attack."

All rushed down again to the little dark room over the gate-house and looked out of the windows.

"Yes," said Robert, "they're all coming out of their tents and moving about like ants. There's that Jakin dancing about where the bridge joins on. I wish he could see me put my tongue out at him! Yah!"

The others were far too pale to wish to put their tongues out at anybody. They looked at Robert with surprised respect. Anthea said, "You really *are* brave, Robert."

And again the trumpet sounded.

"Rot!" Cyril's pallor turned to redness now, all in a minute. "He's been getting ready to be brave all the afternoon, and I wasn't ready, that's all. I shall be braver than he is in half a jiffy."

A trumpeter came forward to the edge of the moat and blew the longest and loudest blast they had yet heard. When the blaring noise had died away a man who was with the trumpeter shouted:—

"What ho, within there!" And his voice came plainly to the garrison in the gate-house.

"Halloa, there!" Robert bellowed back at once.

"In the name of our Lord the King, and of our good Lord and trusty leader, Sir Wulfric de Talbot, we summon this castle to surrender—on pain of fire and sword and no quarter. Do ye surrender?"

"No!" bawled Robert, "of course we don't! Never, never, never!"

The man answered back:—

"Then your fate be on your own heads."

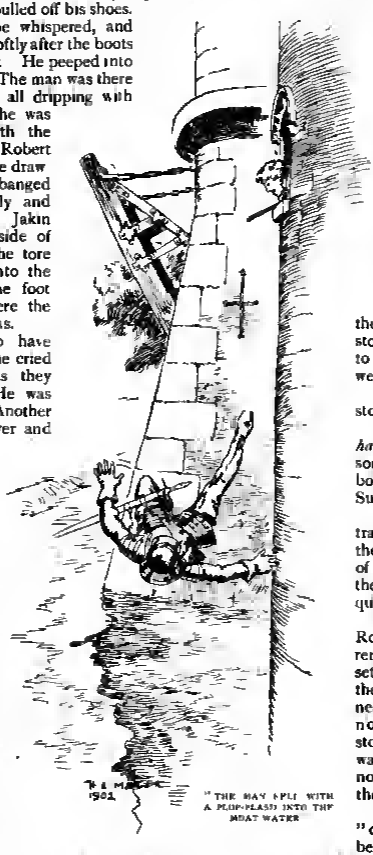
"Cheer," said Robert, in a fierce whisper, "cheer to show them we aren't afraid, and rattle the daggers to make more noise. One, two, three! Hip, hip, hooray! Again, Hip, hip, hooray! One more, Hip, hip, hooray!" The cheers were rather high and weak, but the rattle of the daggers lent them strength and depth.

And as the cheers died away Robert heard

feet on the stairs outside—heavy feet and the clank of steel. No one breathed for a moment. The steel and the feet went on up the turret stairs. Then Robert sprang softly to the door. He pulled off his shoes.

"Wait here," he whispered, and stole quickly and softly after the boots and the spur clank. He peeped into the upper room. The man was there and it was Jakin, all dripping with moat-water, and he was fiddling about with the machinery which Robert felt sure worked the drawbridge. Robert banged the door suddenly and bolted it just as Jakin sprang to the inside of the door. Then he tore downstairs and into the little turret at the foot of the tower, where the biggest window was.

"We ought to have defended *this*!" he cried to the others, as they followed him. He was just in time. Another man had swum over and his fingers were on the window-ledge. Robert never knew how the man had managed to climb up out of the water. But he saw the clinging fingers and hit them as hard as he could with an iron bar that he caught up from the floor. The man fell with a plop-plash into the moat water. In another moment Robert was outside the little room, had banged its door, and was shooting home the enormous bolts and calling to Cyril to lend a hand.



"THE MAN FELL WITH A PLOP-PLASH INTO THE MOAT WATER"

Then they stood in the arched gateway, breathing hard and looking at each other.

There was a creaking above, and then something rattled and shook—the pavement they stood on seemed to tremble. Then a crash told them that the drawbridge had been lowered to its place.

And now the drawbridge rang and echoed hollowly to the hoofs of horses and the tramp of armed men.

"Up, quick,' cried Robert, "let's drop things on them."

Even the girls were feeling almost brave now. They followed Robert quickly, and under his directions began to drop stones out through the long, narrow windows. There was a confused noise below and some groans.

"Oh, dear," said Anthea, putting down the stone she was just going to drop out. "I'm afraid we've hurt somebody!"

Robert caught up the stone in a fury.

"I should just hope we *had*!" he said. "I'd give something for a jolly good boiling kettle of lead. Surrender, indeed!"

And now came more tramping and a pause, and then the thundering thump of the battering-ram. And the little room was almost quite dark.

"We've held it," cried Robert; "we *won't* surrender! The sun *must* set in a minute. Here, they're all jawing underneath again. Pity there's no time to get more stones! Here, pour that water down on them. It's no good, of course, but they'll hate it."

"Oh, dear," said Jane, "don't you think we'd better surrender?"

"Never!" said Robert. "We'll have a parley, if you like, but we'll never surrender. Oh, I'll be a soldier when I grow up, you just see if I don't. I won't go into the Civil Service, whatever anyone says."

"Let's wave a handkerchief and ask for a

parley," Jane pleaded. "I don't believe the sun's going to set to-night at all."

"Give them the water first, the brutes," said the bloodthirsty Robert. So Anthea tilted the pot over the nearest lead hole and poured. They heard a splash below, but no one below seemed to have felt it. And again the ram battered the great door. Anthea paused.

"How idiotic!" said Robert, lying flat on the floor and putting one eye to the lead

"ANTHEA TILTED THE POT OVER THE NEAREST LEAD HOLE.

hole, "of course, the holes go straight down into the gate-house—that's for when the enemy has got past the door and the portcullis and almost all is lost. Here, hand me the pot——" He crawled into the three-cornered window ledge in the middle of the wall, and taking the pot from Anthea poured the water out through the arrow-slit. And as he began to pour the noise of the battering-ram and the trampling of the foe and the shouts of "Surrender!" and "Talbot for ever!" all suddenly stopped and went out like the snuff of a candle, the little dark room seemed to whirl round and turn topsy-turvy, and when the children came to themselves, there they were, safe and sound, in the big front bedroom of their own house—the house with the ornamental iron top to the roof. They all crowded to the window and looked out. The moat and the tents and the besieging force were gone, and there was the garden with its tangle of dahlias and marigolds and asters and late roses, and the spiky iron railings and the quiet white road.

Everyone drew a deep breath.

"And that's all right!" said Robert; "I told you so! And I say — we didn't surrender, did we?"

"Aren't you glad now I wished for a castle?" asked Cyril.

"I think I am *now*," said Anthea, slowly. "But I wouldn't wish for it again, I think."

"Oh, it was simply splendid," said Jane, unexpectedly. "I wasn't frightened a bit."

"Oh, I say!" Cyril was beginning—but Anthea stopped him.

"Look here," she said, "it's just come into my head. This is the very first thing we've wished for that hasn't got us into a row. And there hasn't been the least little scrap of a row about this. Nobody's raging downstairs, we're safe and sound—we've had an awfully jolly day—at least, not jolly exactly, but you know what I mean. And we know now how brave Robert is—and Cyril, too, of course," she added, hastily, "and Jane as well. And we haven't got into a row with a single grown up."

The door was opened suddenly and fiercely.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," said the voice of Martha, and they could tell by her voice that she was very angry indeed; "I thought you couldn't last through the day without getting up to some dodgery! A person can't take a breath of air on the front door-step but you must be emptying the wash-hand jug on to their heads! Off you go to bed, the lot of you, and try to get up better children in the morning. Now, then, don't let me have to tell you twice. If I find any of you not in bed in ten minutes I'll let you know it, that's all. A new cap and everything. Off you go!"

And off they went. And that was the end of the besieged castle.

THE PSAMMEAD.

OR THE GIFTS.

VI—BIGGER THAN THE BAKER'S BOY.

IT all began with a fight that Robert had with the baker's boy, who was a large one, and very cheeky even for the size he was. Robert began it, it is true, by light-heartedly lassoing the baker's boy with a skipping rope when they met him on their way to the sand pit to get the day's wish from the psammead. But the baker's boy behaved in a most cowardly and ungentlemanly way. Instead of fighting with fists, he pulled Robert's hair and kicked him. However, he won, for Jane hung on to Cyril so that he couldn't help Robert without hurting her, and Anthea was poor-spirited enough to cling to the baker's boy and offer abject apologies in Robert's name. The fray ended in the boy's chasing Robert along the road down to the pit and kicking him into a heap of sand.

Cyril was angry with Jane. Robert was furious with Anthea. The girls were perfectly miserable, and nobody was pleased with the baker's boy. There was, as French authors say, "a silence full of emotion."

Then Robert dug his toes and his fingers into the sand and wriggled in his rage. "He'd better wait till I'm grown up—the cowardly brute. Beast—I hate him! But I'll pay him out. Just because he's bigger than me!"

"You began," said Jane, incautiously.

"I know I did, silly, but I was only rotting—and he kicked me—look here."

Robert tore down a stocking and showed a purple bruise touched up with red.

"I only wish I was bigger than him, that's all."

He dug his fingers in the sand and sprang up, for his hand had touched something furry. It was the psammead, of course. "Oh the look out to make sillies of us, as usual," as Cyril remarked later. And, of course, the next moment Robert's wish was granted, and he was bigger than the baker's boy—oh, but much, much bigger. He was bigger than the big policeman who used to be at the crossing at the Mansion House years ago—the one who was so kind in helping ladies over the crossing—and he was the biggest man *I* have ever seen, as well as the kindest. No one had a foot rule in their pocket, so Robert could not be measured; but he was taller than your father would be if he stood on your mother's head, which I am sure he would never be unkind enough to do. He must have been 10ft. or 11ft. high, and as broad as a boy of that height ought to be. His Norfolk suit had fortunately grown too, and now he stood up in it, with one of his enormous stockings turned down to show the gigantic bruise on his vast leg. Immense tears of fury still stood on his flushed giant face. He looked so surprised and he was so large to be wearing an Eton collar that the others could not help laughing.

"The sammyadd's done us again,' said Cyril.

"Not us—*me*," said Robert. "If you'd got any decent feeling you'd try to make it make you the same size. You've no idea how silly it feels," he added, thoughtlessly.

"THE SAMMYADD'S DONE US AGAIN," SAID CYRIL."

"And I don't want to; I can jolly well see how silly it *looks*," Cyril was beginning, but Anthea said:—

"Oh, *don't!* I don't know what's the matter with you boys to-day. Look here, Squirrel, let's play fair; it is hateful for poor old Bobs, all alone up there. Let's ask the sammyadd for another wish, and if it will I do really think we ought to be made the same size."

The others agreed, but not gaily; but when they found the psammead it wouldn't.

"Not I," it said, crossly, rubbing its face with its feet. "He's a rude, violent boy, and it'll do him good to be the wrong size for a bit. What did he want to come digging me out with his nasty wet hands for? He's a perfect savage. A boy of the Stone Age would have had more sense."

Robert's hands had, indeed, been wet—with tears.

"Go away and leave me to get dry in peace, do," the psammead went on. "I can't think why you don't wish for something sensible — something to eat or drink, or good manners, or good tempers. Go along with you, do."

It almost snarled as it shook its whiskers, and turned a sulky brown back on them. The most hopeful felt that further parley was vain.

They turned again to the colossal Robert.

"Whatever shall we do?" they said, and they all said it.

"First," said Robert, grimly, "I'm going to reason with that baker's boy. I shall catch him at the end of the road."

"Don't hit a chap littler than yourself, old man," said Cyril.

"Do I look like hitting him?" asked Robert, scornfully. "Why, I should *kill* him. But I'll give him something to remember. Wait till I pull up my stocking." He pulled up his stocking, which was as large as a small bolster case, and strode off. His strides were 5ft. or 6ft. long, so that it was quite easy for him to be at the bottom of the hill ready to meet the baker's boy when he came down swinging the empty basket, to meet his master's cart which had been leaving bread at the cottages along the road.

Robert crouched behind a haystack in the farmyard that is at the corner, and when he heard the boy come whistling along he jumped out at him and caught him by the collar.

"Now," he said, and his voice was about four times its usual size, just as his body was four times its. "I'm going to teach you to kick boys smaller than you."

He lifted up the baker's boy and set him on the top of the haystack, which was about

"HE LIFTED UP THE BAKER'S BOY AND SET HIM ON THE TOP OF THE HAYSTACK."

16ft from the ground, and then he sat down on the roof of the cowshed and told the baker's boy exactly what he thought of him. I don't think the boy heard it all—he was in a sort of trance of terror. When Robert had said everything he could think of, and some things twice over, he shook the boy and said:—

"And now get down the best way you can," and left him.

I don't know how the baker's boy got down, but I do know that he missed the cart and got into the very hottest of hot water when he turned up at last at the bake-house. I am sorry for him, but, after all, it was quite right that he should be taught that English boys mustn't use their feet when they fight, but their fists. Of course, the water he got into only became hotter when he tried to tell his master about the boy he had licked, who had turned into a giant as high as a church, because no one could possibly believe such a tale as that. Next day the tale was believed—but that was too late to be any good to the baker's boy.

When Robert rejoined the others he found them in the garden. Anthea had thoughtfully asked Martha to let them have dinner out there, because the dining-room was rather small, and it would have been so awkward to have a brother the size of Robert in there. The Lamb, who had slept peacefully during the whole stormy morning, was now found to be sneezing, and Martha said he had a cold and would be better indoors.

"And really it's just as well," said Cyril, "for I don't believe he'd ever have stopped screaming if he'd once seen you the awful size you are!"

Robert was indeed what a draper would call an "out size" in boys. He found himself able to step right over the iron gate into the front garden.

Martha brought out the dinner—it was cold veal and baked potatoes, with sago pudding and stewed plums to follow.

She, of course, did not notice that Robert was anything but the usual size, and she gave him as much meat and potatoes as usual and no more. You have no idea how small your usual helping of dinner looks when you are four times your proper size. Robert groaned and asked for more bread. But Martha would not go on giving more bread for ever. She was in a hurry because the keeper intended to call on his way to Benenhurst Fair, and she wished to be dressed smartly before he came.

"I wish *we* were going to the fair," said Robert.

"You can't go anywhere that size," said Cyril.

"Why not?" said Robert. "They have giants at fairs, much bigger ones than me."

"Not much, they don't," Cyril was beginning, when Jane screamed "Oh!" with such loud suddenness that they all thumped her on the back and asked whether she had swallowed a plum-stone.

"No," she said, breathless from being thumped, "it's not a plum-stone. It's an idea. Let's take Robert to the fair and get them to give us money for showing him! Then we really *shall* get something out of the old sammyadd, at last!"

"Take me, indeed," said Robert, indignantly. "Much more likely me take you!"

And so it turned out. The idea appealed irresistibly to everyone but Robert, and even he was brought round by Anthea's suggestion that he should have a double share of any money they might make. There was a little old pony-trap in the coach-house—the kind that is called a governess cart. It seemed desirable to get to the fair as quickly as possible, so Robert, who could now take enormous steps, and so go very fast indeed, consented to wheel the others in this. It was as easy to him, now, as wheeling the Lamb in the mail-cart had been in the morning. The Lamb's cold prevented his being of the party.

"IT WAS A STRANGE SENSATION, BEING WHEELED IN A PONY-CARRIAGE BY A GIANT."

It was a strange sensation, being wheeled in a pony-carriage by a giant. Everyone enjoyed the journey except Robert and the few people they passed on the way. These mostly went into what looked like some kind of standing-up fits by the roadside. Just outside Benenhurst Robert hid in a barn, and the others went on to the fair.

There were some swings, and a hooting-tooting, blaring merry go-round, and a shooting-gallery, and cocoa-nut shies. Resisting an impulse to win a cocoa-nut—or, at least, to attempt the enterprise—Cyril went up to the woman who was loading little guns before the array of glass bottles on strings against a sheet of canvas.

"Here you are, little gentleman," she said. "Penny a shot."

"No, thank you," said Cyril. "We are here on business, not pleasure. Who's the master?"

"The what?"

"The master—the head—the boss of the show."

"Over there," she said, pointing to a stout man in a linen jacket who was sleeping in the sun; "but I don't advise you to wake him sudden. His temper's contrairy, especially these hot days. Better have a shot while you're waiting."

"It's rather important," said Cyril. "It'll be very profitable to him. I think he'll be sorry if we take it away."

"Oh, if it's money in his pocket," said the woman. "No kid, now. What is it?"

"It's a *giant*."

"You *are* kidding."

"Come along and see," said Anthea.

The woman looked doubtfully at them, then she called to a ragged little girl in striped stockings and a dingy white petticoat that came below her brown frock, and leaving her in charge of the "shooting-gallery" she turned to Anthea and said: "Well, hurry up. But if you *are* kidding you'd best say so. I'm as mild as milk myself, but my Bill, he's a fair terror, and——"

Anthea led the way to the barn. "It really *is* a giant," she said. "He's a giant little boy, in Norfolks like my brother's there. And we didn't bring him right up to the fair because people do stare so, and they seem to go into kind of standing up fits when they see him. And we thought perhaps you'd like to show him and get pennies, and if you like to pay us something you can, only it'll have to be rather a lot because we promised him he should have a double share of whatever we made."

The woman murmured something indistinct of which the children could only hear the words, "swelp me," "balmy," and "crumpet," which conveyed no definite idea to their minds

She had taken Anthea's hand, and Anthea could not help wondering what would happen if Robert should have wandered off or turned his proper size during the interval. But she knew that the psammead's gifts really did seem to last till sunset, however inconvenient their lasting might be, and she did not think, somehow, that Robert would care to go out alone while he was that size.

When they reached the barn and Cyril called "Robert!" there was a stir among the loose hay, and Robert began to come out. His hand and arm came first, then a foot and leg. When the woman saw the hand she said, "My!" but when she saw the foot she said, "Upon my civvy!" And when, by slow and heavy degrees, the whole of Robert's enormous bulk was at last completely disclosed, she drew a long breath and began to say many things, compared with which "balmy" and "crumpet" seemed quite ordinary. She dropped into understandable English at last.

"What'll you take for him?" she said, excitedly. "Anything in reason. We'd have a special van built—leastways, I know where there's a second-hand one would do up handsome—what a baby elephant had as did. What'll you take? He's soft, ain't he? Them giants mostly is, but I never see—no, never. What'll you take? Down on the nail. We'll treat him like a king and give him first-rate grub and a doss fit for a bloomin' dook. He must be soft or he wouldn't need you kids to cart him about. What'll you take for him?"

"They won't take anything," said Robert, sternly. "I'm no more soft than you are—not so much, I shouldn't wonder. I'll come and be a show for to-day if you'll give me——"—he hesitated at the enormous price he was about to ask—"if you'll give me fifteen shillings."

"Done," said the woman, so quickly that Robert felt he had been unfair to himself, and wished he had asked for thirty. "Come on, now, and see my Bill, and we'll fix a price for the season. I dessay you might get as much as two quid a week reg'lar. Come on and make yourself as small as you can, for gracious sake."

This was not very small, and a crowd gathered quickly, so that it was at the head of an enthusiastic procession that Robert entered the trampled meadow where the fair was held, and passed over the stubbly yellow, dusty grass to the door of the biggest tent. He crept in, and the woman went to call her Bill. He was the big sleeping man, and he did not seem at all pleased at being awakened. Cyril watching through a slit in the tent saw him scowl and shake a heavy fist and a sleepy head. Then the woman went on speaking very fast. Cyril heard "Strewth" and "Biggest draw you ever, so help me!" And he began to share Robert's feelings that fifteen shillings was indeed not nearly enough. Bill slouched up to the tent and entered. When he beheld the magnificent proportions of Robert he said but little. "Strike me pink!" were the only words the children could afterwards remember, but he produced fifteen shillings, mainly in sixpences and coppers, and handed it to Robert.

"We'll fix up about what you're to draw when the show's over to-night," he said, with hoarse heartiness. "Lor' love a duck, you'll be that happy with us you'll never want to leave us. Can you do a song now, or a bit of a breakdown?"

"Not to-day," said Robert, rejecting the idea of trying to sing "As Once in May," a favourite of his mother's, and the only song he could think of at the moment.

"Get Levi, and clear them bloomin' photos. out," said Bill. "Clear the tent—stick up a curtain or suthink," the man went on. "Lor', what a pity we ain't got no tights his size! But we'll have 'em before the week's out. Young man, your fortune's made. It's a good thing you came to me and not to some chaps as I could tell you on. I've known blokes as beat their giants and starved 'em too, so I'll tell you straight you're in luck this day if you never was afore. 'Cos I'm a lamb, I am—and I don't deceive you."

"I'm not afraid of anyone's beating *me*," said Robert, looking down on the "lamb." Robert was crouched on his knees, because the tent was not big enough for him to stand upright in, but even in that position he could still look down on most people. "But I'm awfully hungry, I wish you'd get me some thing to eat."

"Here, 'Becca," said the hoarse Bill, "get him some grub—the best you've got, mind." Another whisper followed, of which the children only heard 'down in black and white"—"sealed and stamped first thing to-morrow."

Then the woman went to get the food—it

was only bread and cheese when it came, but it was delightful to the large and empty Robert—and the man went to post sentinels round the tent, to give the alarm if Robert should attempt to escape with his fifteen shillings.

"As if we weren't honest," said Anthea, indignantly, when the meaning of the sentinels dawned on her.

"WHEN THE GIRL CAME OUT SHE WAS PALE AND TREMBLING."

Then began a very strange and wonderful afternoon.

Bill was a man who knew his business. In a very little while the photographic views, the spy-glasses you look at them through, so that they really seem rather real, and the lights you see them by, were all packed away. A curtain—it was an old red and black carpet, really—was run across the tent. Robert was concealed behind it and Bill was standing on a trestle-table outside the tent making a speech. It was rather a good speech. It began by saying that the giant it was his privilege to introduce to the public that day was the eldest son of the Emperor of San Francisco, compelled through an unfortunate love affair with the Duchess of the Fiji Islands to leave his own country and take refuge in England—the land of liberty, where freedom was the right of every man, no matter how big he was. It ended by the announcement that the first twenty who came to the tent-door should see the giant for threepence apiece. "After that," said Bill, "the price is riz, and I don't undertake to say what it won't be riz to. So now's yer time."

A young man squiring his sweetheart on her afternoon out was the first to come forward. For that occasion his was the princely attitude—no expense spared—money no object. His girl wished to see the giant? Well, she should see the giant, even though seeing the giant cost threepence each, and the other entertainments were all penny ones.

The flap of the tent was raised—the couple entered. Next moment a wild shriek from the girl thrilled through the crowd outside. Bill slapped his leg. "That's done the trick," he whispered to 'Becca. It was, indeed, a splendid advertisement of the charms of Robert. When the girl came out she was pale and trembling, and a larger crowd than before was round the tent.

"WHEN YOUR TIME'S UP COME TO ME."

"What was it like?" asked a bailiff.

"Oh, horrid—you wouldn't believe," she said. "It's as big as a barn, and that fierce. It froze the blood in my bones. I wouldn't ha' missed seeing it for anything."

The fierceness was only caused by Robert's trying not to laugh. But the desire to do that soon left him, and before sunset he was more inclined to cry than to laugh, and more inclined to sleep than either. For by ones, and twos, and threes people kept coming in all the afternoon, and Robert had to shake hands with those who wished it and to allow himself to be punched, and pulled, and patted, and thumped, so that people might make sure he was really real.

The other children sat on a bench and watched and waited, and were very bored indeed. It seemed to them that this was the hardest way of earning money that could have been invented. And only fifteen shillings. Bill had taken four times that already, for the news of the giant had spread, and tradespeople in carts and gentlepeople in carriages came from far and near. One gentleman with an eyeglass, and a very large yellow rose in his buttonhole, offered Robert, in an obliging whisper, £10 a week to appear at the Royal Aquarium. Robert had to say "No."

"I can't," he said, regretfully. "It's no use promising what you can't do."

"Ah, poor fellow, bound for a term of years, I suppose. Well, here's my card. When your time's up come to me."

"I will—if I'm the same size then," said Robert, truthfully.

"If you grow a bit, so much the better," said the gentleman.

When he had gone, Robert beckoned Cyril and said:—

"Tell them I must and will have an easy. And I want my tea."

Tea was provided, and a paper hastily pinned on the tent. It said—

"CLOSED FOR HALF AN HOUR WHILE THE GIANT GETS HIS TEA."

Then there was a hurried council.

"How am I to get away?" said Robert. "I've been thinking about it all the afternoon."

"Why, walk out when the sun sets and you're your right size. They can't do anything to us."

Robert opened his eyes. "Why, they'd nearly kill us," he said, "when they saw me get my right size. No, we must think of

some other way We *must* be alone when the sun sets."

"I know," said Cyril, briskly, and he went to the door outside which Bill was smoking a clay pipe and talking in a low voice to 'Becca. Cyril heard him say, "Good as havin' a fortune left you."

"Look here," said Cyril; "you can let people come in again in a minute He's nearly finished his tea. But he *must* be left alone when the sun sets. He's very queer at that time of day, and if he's worried I won't answer for the consequences."

"Why, what comes over him?" asked Bill

"I don't know; it's—it's a sort of a *change*," said Cyril, candidly "He isn't at all like himself—you'd hardly know him. He's very queer indeed. Someone'll get hurt if he's not alone about sunset." This was true

"He'll pull round for the evening, I s'pose?"

"Oh, yes—half an hour after sunset he'll be quite himself again."

"Best humour him," said the woman.

And so, at what Cyril judged was about half an hour before sunset, the tent was again closed "whilst the giant gets his supper"

The crowd was very merry about the giant's meals and their coming so close together.

"Well, he can peck a bit," Bill owned. "You see, he has to eat hearty, being the size he is."

Inside the tent the four children breathlessly arranged a plan of retreat.

"You go *now*," said Cyril to the girls, "and get along home as fast as you can Oh, never mind the beastly pony cart, we'll get that to-morrow! Robert and I are dressed the same. We'll manage somehow like Sydney Carton did. Only you girls *must* get out, or it's all no go. We can run, but you can't—whatever you may think. No, Jane, it's no good Robert going out and knorking people down The police would follow him till he turned his proper size and then arrest him like a shot Go—you must If you don't I'll never speak to you again. It was you got us into this mess, really, hanging round people's legs the way you did this morning *Go*—I tell you."

And Jane and Anthea went

"We're going home," they said to Bill "We're leaving the giant with you Be kind to him" And that, as Anthea said afterwards, was very deceitful, but what were they to do?

When they had gone Cyril went to Bill

"Look here," he said, "he wants some ears of corn, there's some in the next field but one. I'll just run and get it Oh, and he says can't you loop up the tent at the back a bit. He says he's stifling for a breath of air. I'll see no one peeps in at him I'll cover him up and he can take a nap while I go for the corn He *will* have it; there's no holding him when he gets like this."

The giant was made comfortable with a heap of sacks and an old tarpaulin. The curtain was looped up and the brothers were left alone. They matured their plan in whispers. Outside the merry-go-round blared out its comic tunes, screaming now and then to attract notice Half a minute after the sun had set a boy in a Norfolk suit came out past Bill

"I'm off for the corn," he said, and mingled quickly with the crowd

At the same instant a boy came out of the back of the tent past 'Becca, posted there as sentinel.

"I'm off after the corn," said this boy also. And he, too, moved away quietly and was lost in the crowd The front door boy was Cyril, the back door boy was Robert—now, since sunset, once more his proper size. They walked quickly through the field and along the road, where Robert caught Cyril up. Then they ran. They were home as soon as the girls were, for it was a long way, and they ran most of it. It was, indeed, a *very* long way, as they found when they had to go and drag the pony-trap home next morning, with no enormous Robert to wheel them in it as if it were a mail cart, and they were babies and he was their gigantic nursemaid.

I cannot possibly tell you what Bill and 'Becca said when they found that the giant had gone For one thing, I do not know

By E. Nesbit

VII.—THE ELDER BROTHER

CYRIL had once pointed out that ordinary life is full of occasions on which a wish would be most useful. And this thought filled his mind when he happened to wake early on the morning after the morning after Robert had wished to be bigger than the baker's boy, and had been it. The day that lay between these two days had been occupied entirely by getting the governess-cart home from Benenhurst.

Cyril dressed hastily; he did not take a bath because tin baths are so noisy and he had no wish to rouse Robert, and he slipped off alone, as Anthea had once done, and ran through the dewy morning to the sand-pit. He dug up the psammead very carefully and kindly, and began the conversation by asking it whether it still felt any ill-effects from the contact with the tears of Robert the day before yesterday. The psammead was in a good temper. It replied politely:

"And now what can I do for you?" it said. "I suppose you've come here so early to ask for something for yourself—something your brothers and sisters aren't to know about—eh? Now, do be persuaded for your own good! Ask for a good fat megatherium and have done with it."

"Thank you—not to-day, I think," said Cyril, cautiously. "What I really wanted to say was—you know how you're always wishing for things when you're playing at anything?"

"I seldom play," said the psammead, coldly.

"Well, you know what I mean," Cyril went on, impatiently. "What I want to say is, won't you let us have our wish just when we think of it, and just where we happen to be, so that we don't have to come and disturb you again?" added the artful Cyril.

"It'll only end in your wishing for something you don't really want," said the psammead, stretching its brown hands and yawning. "It's always the same since people left off eating really wholesome things. However, have it your own way. Good bye!"

"Good bye!" said Cyril, politely.

"I'll tell you what," said the psammead, suddenly, shooting out its long snail's eyes, "I'm getting tired of you—all of you. You have no more sense than so many oysters. Go along with you."

And Cyril went.

"What an awful long time babies *stay* babies!" said Cyril, after the Lamb had taken his watch out of his pocket while he wasn't noticing, and with coos and clucks of naughty rapture had opened the case and used the whole thing as a garden spade, and when even immersion in a washhand basin had failed to wash the mould from the works and make the watch go again. Cyril had said several things in the heat of the moment, but now he was calmer, and had even consented to carry the Lamb part of the way to the woods. Cyril had persuaded the others to agree to his plan and not to wish for anything more till they really did wish it. Meantime it seemed good to go to the woods for nuts, and on the mossy grass under a sweet chestnut tree the five were sitting. The Lamb was pulling up the moss by fat handfuls, and Cyril was gloomily contemplating the ruins of his watch.

"HE OPENED THE CASE AND USED THE WHOLE THING AS A GARDEN SPADE."

"He does grow," said Anthea. "Doesn't oo, precious?"

"Me grow," said the Lamb, cheerfully—"me grow big boy, have guns an' mouses—an'—an——" Imagination or vocabulary gave out here. But any way it was the longest speech the Lamb had ever made, and it charmed everyone, even Cyril, who tumbled the Lamb over and rolled him in the moss to the music of delighted squeals.

"I suppose he'll be grown up some day," Anthea was saying, dreamily looking up at the blue of the sky that showed between the long, straight chestnut leaves. But at that moment the Lamb, struggling gaily with Cyril, thrust a stoutly-shod little foot against his brother's chest, there was a crack, and the innocent Lamb had broken the glass of father's second best Waterbury watch, which Cyril had borrowed without leave.

"Grow up some day," said Cyril, bitterly, plumping the Lamb down on the grass. "I dare say he will — when nobody wants him to. I wish to goodness he would——"

"*Oh*, take care," cried Anthea, in an agony of apprehension. But it was too late. Like music to a song her words and Cyril's came out together.

Anthea. "Oh, take care."

Cyril. "Grow up now."

The faithful psammead was true to its promise, and there, before the horrified eyes of its brothers and sisters, the Lamb suddenly and violently grew up. It was a most terrible moment. The change was not so sudden as the wish changes usually were. The baby's face changed first. It grew thinner and larger, lines came in the forehead, the eyes grew more deep-set and darker in colour, the mouth grew longer and thinner; most terrible of all, a little dark moustache appeared on the lip of one who was still, except as to the face, a two-year-old baby in a linen smock and white open-work socks.

"Oh, I wish it wouldn't—oh, I wish it wouldn't—you boys might wish as well." They all wished hard, for the sight was enough to dismay the most heartless. They all wished so hard, indeed, that they felt quite giddy and almost lost consciousness; but the wishing was quite vain, for when the

wood ceased to whirl round their dazzled eyes were riveted at once by the spectacle of a very proper-looking young man in grey flannels and a straw hat—a young man who wore the same little black moustache which just before they had actually seen growing upon the baby's lip. This, then, was the Lamb—grown up! Their own Lamb! It was a terrible moment. The grown-up Lamb moved gracefully across the moss and settled himself against the trunk of the sweet chestnut. He tilted the straw hat over his eyes. He was evidently weary. He was going to sleep. The Lamb—the original, little, tiresome, beloved Lamb—often went to sleep at odd times and in unexpected places. Was this new Lamb in the grey flannel suit and the pale green necktie like the other Lamb, or had his mind grown up together with his body?

That was the question which the others, in a hurried council held among the yellowing bracken a few yards from the sleeper, debated eagerly.

"Whichever it is it'll be just as awful," said Anthea, "if his inside senses are grown up, too, he won't stand our looking after him. and if he's still a baby inside of him, how on earth are we to get him to do anything? And it'll be getting on for dinner time in a minute——"

"And we haven't got any nuts," said Jane.

"Oh, bother nuts," said Robert, "but dinner's different; I didn't have half enough dinner the day before yesterday. Couldn't we tie him to the tree and go home to our dinners and come back afterwards?"

"A fat lot of dinner we should get if we went back without the Lamb!" said Cyril, in scornful misery. "And it'll be just the same if we go back *with* him, in the state he is now. Yes, I know it's my doing, don't rub it in! I know I'm a beast and not fit to live, you can take that for settled and say no more about it. The question is, what are we going to do?"

"Let's wake him up and take him into Rochester or Maidstone and get some grub at a pastrycook's," said Robert, hopefully.

"Take him?" repeated Cyril. "Yes—do! It's all my fault, I don't deny that, but you'll find you've got your work cut out for you if you try to take that young man anywhere. The Lamb always was spoilt, but now he's grown up he's a demon, simply. I can see it, look at his mouth."

"Well, then," said Robert, "let's wake him up and see what *he'll* do. Perhaps *he'll* take *us* to Maidstone and stand sam. He ought to have a hat of money in the pockets of those extra special bags. We *must* have dinner, any way."

They drew lots with little bits of bracken. It fell to Jane's lot to waken the grown-up Lamb.

She did it gently by tickling his nose with a twig of wild honeysuckle. He said "Bother the flies" twice, and then opened his eyes.

"Halloa, kiddies!" he said, in a languid

"SHE DID IT GENTLY BY TICKLING HIS NOSE WITH A TWIG."

tone, "still here? What's the giddy hour? You'll be late for your grub!"

"I know we shall," said Robert, bitterly.

"Then cut along home," said the grown-up Lamb.

"What about *your* grub, though?" asked Jane.

"Oh, how far is it to the station, do you think? I've a sort of notion that I'll run up to town and have some lunch at the club."

Blank misery fell like a pall on the four others. The Lamb—alone—unattended—would go to town and have lunch at a club! Perhaps he would also have tea there. Perhaps sunset would come upon him amid the dazzling luxury of club-land, and a helpless, cross, sleepy baby would find itself alone amid unsympathetic waiters, and would wail miserably for Panty from the depths of a club arm-chair! The picture moved Anthea almost to tears.

"Oh, no, Lamb, ducky, you mustn't do that," she cried, incautiously.

The grown-up Lamb frowned. "My dear Anthea," he said, "how often am I to tell you that my name is Hilary, or St Maur, or Devereux—any of my baptismal names are free to my little brothers and sisters, but *not* 'Lamb'—a relic of foolish and far-off childhood."

This was awful. He was their elder brother now, was he? Well, of course he was, if he was grown up. Thus, in whispers, Anthea and Robert.

But the almost daily adventures resulting from the psammead wishes were making the children wise beyond their years.

"Dear Hilary," said Anthea, and the others choked at the name. "You know father didn't wish you to go to London. He wouldn't like us to be left alone without you to take care of us!"

Oh, deceitful beast that I am!", she added to herself.

"Look here," said Cyril, "if you're our elder brother why not behave as such, and take us over to Maidstone and give us a jolly good blow-out, and we'll go on the river afterwards."

"I'm infinitely obliged to you," said the Lamb, courteously, "but I should prefer solitude. Go home to your lunch—I mean your dinner. Perhaps I may look in about tea-time—or I may not be home till after you are in your beds."

Their beds! Speaking glances flashed between the wretched four. Much bed there would be for them if they went home without the Lamb.

"We promised mother not to lose sight of you if we took you out," Jane said, before the others could stop her.

"Look here, Jane," said the grown-up Lamb, putting his hands in his pockets and looking down at her, "little girls should be seen and not heard. You kids must learn not to make yourselves a nuisance. Run along home now, and perhaps if you're good I'll give you each a penny to-morrow."

"Look here," said Cyril, in the best "man to man" tone at his command, "where are you going, old man? You might let Bobs and me come with you, even if you don't want the girls."

This was really rather noble of Cyril, for he never had cared much about being seen in public with the Lamb, who, of course, after sunset would be a baby again.

The "man to man" tone succeeded.

"I shall just run over to Maidstone on my

THERE SHE ENDEAR STOOD A BICYCLE."

bike," said the new Lamb, airily, fingering the little black moustache. "I can lunch at the Crown—and perhaps I'll have a pull on the river—but I can't take you all on the machine, now, can I? Run along home like good children."

The position was desperate. Robert exchanged a despairing look with Cyril. Anthea detached a safety-pin from her waistband, a pin whose withdrawal left a gaping chasm between skirt and bodice, and handed it furtively to Robert, with a grimace of the darkest and deepest meaning. Robert slipped away to the road. There, sure enough, stood a bicycle—a beautiful new free-wheel. Of course, Robert understood at once that if the Lamb was grown up he *must* have a bicycle. This had always been one of Robert's own reasons for wishing to be grown up. He hastily began to use the pin—eleven punctures in the back tyre, seven in the front. He would have made the total twenty-two but for the rustling of the yellow hazel leaves, which warned him of the approach of the others. He hastily leaned a hand on each wheel and was rewarded by the "whish" of what was left of air escaping from eighteen neat pinholes.

"Your bike's run down," said Robert, wondering how he could so soon have learned to deceive.

"So it is," said Cyril.

"It's a puncture," said Anthea, stooping down and standing up again with a thorn which she had got ready for the purpose. "Look here."

The grown-up Lamb—or Hilary, as I suppose one must now call him—fixed his pump and blew up the tyre. The punctured state of it was soon evident.

"I suppose there's a cottage somewhere near where one could get a pail of water?" said the Lamb.

There was—and when the number of punctures had been made manifest it was felt to be a special blessing that the cottage provided "teas for cyclists." It provided an odd sort of tea-and-hammy meal for the Lamb and his brothers and sisters. This was paid for out of the fifteen shillings which had been earned by Robert when he was a giant, for the Lamb, it appeared, had, unfortunately, no money about him. This was a great disappointment for the others, but it is a thing that will happen even to the most grown-up of us. However, Robert had enough to eat, and that was something. Quietly but persistently the miserable four took it in turns to try and persuade the Lamb (or St. Maur) to spend the rest of the day in the woods.

"THE PUNCTURED STATE OF IT WAS SOON EVIDENT"

There was not very much of the day left by the time he had mended the eighteenth puncture. He looked up from the completed work with a sigh of relief, and suddenly put his tie straight.

"There's a lady coming," he said, briskly "for goodness' sake get out of the way. Go home—hide—vanish somehow. I can't be seen with a pack of dirty kids." His brothers and sisters were indeed rather dirty, because earlier in the day the Lamb, in his infant

state, had sprinkled a good deal of garden soil over them. The grown-up Lamb's voice was so tyrant-like, as Jane said afterwards, that they actually retreated to the back-garden and left him with his little moustache and his flannel suit to meet alone the young lady, who now came up the front garden wheeling a bicycle.

The woman of the house came out and the young lady spoke to her. The Lamb raised his hat as she passed him, and the children could not hear what she said, though they were craning round the corner by the pig-pail and listening with all their ears. They felt it to be "perfectly fair," as Robert said, "with that wretched Lamb in that condition."

When the Lamb spoke in a languid voice, heavy with politeness, they heard well enough

"A puncture?" he was saying. "Can I not be of any assistance? If you would allow me——?"

There was a stifled explosion of laughter behind the pig-pail; the grown-up Lamb (otherwise Devereux) turned the tail of an angry eye in its direction.

"You're very kind," said the lady, looking at the Lamb. She looked rather shy, but, as the boys put it, there didn't seem to be any nonsense about her.

"But, oh," whispered Cyril, behind the pig-pail, "I should have thought he'd had enough bicycle-mending for one day, and, if she only knew that really and truly he's only a whiny-piny, silly little baby!"

"He's *not*," Anthea murmured, angrily. "He's a dear, if people only let him alone. It's our own precious Lamb still, whatever silly idiots may turn him into, isn't he, Pussy?"

Jane doubtfully supposed so.

Now the Lamb—whom I must try to remember to call St. Maur—was examining the lady's bicycle and talking to her with a very grown-up manner indeed. No one could possibly have supposed, to see and hear him, that only that very morning he had been a chubby child of less than two years breaking other people's Waterbury watches. Devereux (as he ought to be called for the future) took out a gold watch when he had mended the lady's bicycle, and all the on-lookers behind the pig-pail said "Oh!" because it seemed so unfair that the baby, who had only that morning destroyed two cheap, but honest, watches, should now, in the grown-upness Cyril's folly had raised him to, have a real gold watch, with a chain and seals!

Hilary (as I will now term him) withered his brothers and sisters with a glance, and then said to the lady, with whom he seemed to be quite friendly—

"If you will allow me, I will ride with you as far as the cross-roads—it is getting late, and there are tramps about."

No one will ever know what answer the young lady intended to give to this gallant offer, for directly Anthea heard it made she rushed out, knocking over the pig-pail, which overflowed in a turbid stream, and caught the Lamb (I suppose I ought to say Hilary) by the arm. The others followed, and in an instant the four dirty children were visible beyond disguise.

"Don't let him," said Anthea to the lady, and she spoke with intense earnestness, "he's not fit to go with anyone!"

"Go away, little girl!" said St. Maur (as we will now call him), in a terrible voice. "Go home at once."

"You'd much better not have anything to do with him," the now reckless Anthea went on. "He doesn't know who he is. He's something very different from what you think he is."

"What do you mean?" asked the lady, not unnaturally, while Devereux (as I must term the grown-up Lamb) tried vainly to push Anthea away. The others backed her up and she stood solid as a rock.

"You just let him go with you," said Anthea, "you'll soon see what I mean! How would you like to suddenly see a poor little helpless baby spinning along downhill beside you with its feet up on a bicycle it had lost control of?"

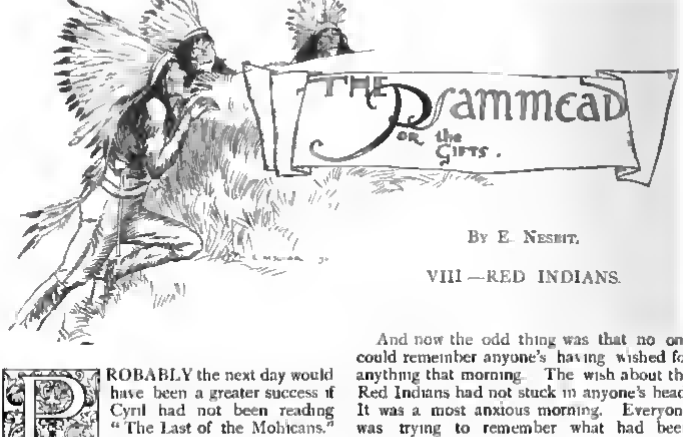
The lady had turned rather pale.

"Who are these very dirty children?" she asked the grown-up Lamb (sometimes called St. Maur in these pages).

"I don't know," he lied, miserably.

"Oh, Lamb! how *can* you," cried Jane, "when you know perfectly well you're our own little baby brother that we're so fond of? We're his big brothers and sisters," she explained, turning to the lady, who, with trembling hands, was now turning her bicycle towards the gate, "and we've got to take care of him. And we must get him home before sunset, or I don't know whatever will become of us. You see, he's sort of under a spell—enchanted, you know what I mean."

Again and again the Lamb (Devereux I mean) had tried to stop Jane's eloquence, but Robert and Cyril held him one by each leg, and no proper explanation was possible.



By E. Nesbit.

VIII.—RED INDIANS.

PROBABLY the next day would have been a greater success if Cyril had not been reading "The Last of the Mohicans." The story was running in his head at breakfast, and as he took his third cup of tea he said, dreamily, "I wish there were Red Indians in England—not big ones, you know, but little ones, just about the right size for us to fight."

Everyone disagreed with him at the time, and no one attached any importance to the incident. But when they went down to the sand-pit to ask for a hundred pounds in two-shilling pieces with Queen Victoria's head on to prevent mistakes—which they had decided on after long discussion as a really reasonable wish that must turn out well—they found out that they had done it again. For the psammead, which was very cross and sleepy, said—

"Oh, don't bother me. You've had your wish."

"I didn't know it," said Cyril.

"Don't you remember yesterday?" said the sand fairy, still more disagreeably. "You asked me to let you have your wishes wherever you happened to be, and you wished this morning, and you've got it."

"Oh, have we?" said Robert. "What is it?"

"So you've forgotten," said the psammead, beginning to burrow. "Never mind, you'll know soon enough. And I wish you joy of it. A nice thing you've let yourselves in for."

"We always do, somehow," said Jane, sadly.

And now the odd thing was that no one could remember anyone's having wished for anything that morning. The wish about the Red Indians had not stuck in anyone's head. It was a most anxious morning. Everyone was trying to remember what had been wished for, and no one could, and everyone kept expecting something awful to happen every minute. It was most agitating, they knew from what the psammead had said that they must have wished for something more than usually undesirable, and they spent several hours in most agonizing uncertainty. It was not till nearly dinner-time that Jane tumbled over "The Last of the Mohicans," which had, of course, been left face downwards on the floor, and when Anthea had picked her and the book up she suddenly said, "I know!" and sat down flat on the carpet.

"Oh, Pussy, how awful! It was Indians he wished for—Cyril—at breakfast, don't you remember? He said, 'I wish there were Red Indians in England'—and now there are, and they're going about scalping people all over the country, as likely as not."

"Perhaps they're only in Northumberland and Durham," said Jane, soothingly. It was almost impossible to believe that it could really hurt people much to be scalped so far away as that.

"Don't you believe it," said Anthea, "the sammyadd said we'd let ourselves in for a nice thing. That means they'll come *here*. And suppose they scalped the Lamb?"

"Perhaps the scalping would come right again at sunset," said Jane, but she did not speak so hopefully as usual.

"Not it," said Anthea, "the things that

grow out of the wishes don't go. Look at the fifteen shillings. Pussy, I'm going to break something, and you must let me have every penny of money you've got. The Indians will come *here*, don't you see. That spiteful sammyadd as good as said so. You see what my plan is? Come on!"

Jane did not see at all. But she followed her sister meekly into their mother's bedroom.

Anthea lifted down the heavy water-jug, it had a pattern of storks and long grasses on it, which Anthea never forgot. She carried it into the dressing-room and carefully emptied the water out of it into the bath; then she took the jug back into the bedroom and dropped it on the floor. You know how a jug always breaks if you happen to drop it by accident? If you happen to drop it on purpose it is quite different. Anthea dropped that jug three times and it was as unbroken as ever, so at last she had to take her father's boot-tree and break the jug with that in cold blood. It was heartless work.

Next she broke open the missionary-box with the poker. Jane told her that it was wrong, of course; but Anthea shut her lips very tight and then said:—

"Don't be silly; it's a matter of life and death."

There was not very much in the missionary-box—only seven and fourpence—but the girls between them had nearly four shillings. This made over eleven shillings, as you will easily see.

Anthea tied up the money in a corner of her pocket-handkerchief. "Come on, Jane," she said, and ran down to the farm. She knew that the farmer was going into Rochester that afternoon. In fact, it had been arranged that he was to take the four children with him. They had planned this in the happy hour when they believed that they were going to get that hundred pounds in two-shilling pieces out of the psammead. They had arranged to pay the farmer two shillings each for the ride. Now Anthea hastily explained to him that they could not go, but would he take Martha and the baby instead? He agreed, but he was not pleased to get only half a crown instead of eight shillings.

Then the girls ran home again. Anthea was agitated, but not flurried. When she came to think it over afterwards she could not help seeing that she had acted with the most far-seeing promptitude, just like a born general. She fetched a little box from her corner drawer, and went to find Martha, who was laying the cloth and not in the best of tempers.

"Look here," said Anthea. "I've broken the toilet jug in mother's room."

"Just like you—always up to some mischief," said Martha, dumping down a salt-cellar with a bang.

"Don't be cross, Martha, dear," said Anthea. "I've got enough money to pay for a new one, if only you'll be a dear and go and buy it for us. Your cousins keep a china shop, don't they? And I would like you to get it to-day, in case mother comes home to-morrow. You know she said she might, perhaps."

"NEXT SHE BROKE OPEN THE MISSIONARY BOX WITH THE POKER"

"But you're all going into town yourselves," said Martha.

"We can't afford to if we get the new jug," said Anthea, "but we'll pay for you to go if you'll take the Lamb, and I say, Martha,

look here, I'll give you my Liberty box if you'll go. Look! it's most awfully pretty, all inlaid with real silver and ivory and ebony, like King Solomon's temple."

"I see," said Martha, "no, *I* don't want your box, miss. What *you* want is to get the precious Lamb off your hands for the afternoon. Don't you go for to think I don't see through you."

This was so true that Anthea longed to deny it at once. Martha had no business to know so much. But she held her tongue.

Martha set down the bread with a bang that made it jump off its trencher.

"I *do* want the jug got," said Anthea, softly. "You *will* go, won't you?"

"Well, just for this once, I don't mind, but, mind you don't get into none of your outrageous mischief while I'm gone—that's all!"

"He's going earlier than he thought," said Anthea, eagerly. "You'd better hurry and get dressed. Do put on that lovely purple frock, Martha, and the hat with the pink cornflowers. Jane'll finish laying the cloth, and I'll wash the Lamb and get him ready."

"ANTHEA PEEPED OUT OF THE WINDOW FROM TIME TO TIME."

As she washed the unwilling Lamb and hurried him into his best clothes, Anthea peeped out of the window from time to time; so far all was well—she could see no Red Indians. When, with a rush and a skurry, and some deepening of the damask of Martha's complexion, she and the Lamb had been got off, Anthea drew a deep breath.

"*He's* safe!" she said, and to Jane's horror flung herself down on the floor and burst into floods of tears. Jane did not understand at all how a person could be so brave and like a general, and then suddenly give way and go flat like an air-balloon when you prick it. It is better not to go flat, of course, but you will observe that Anthea did not give way till her aim was accomplished. She had got the dear Lamb out of danger; she felt certain that the Red Indians would be round the White House or nowhere—the farmer's cart would not come back till after sunset, so she could afford to cry a little. It was partly with joy that she cried, because she had done what she meant to do. She cried for about three minutes while Jane hugged her miserably and said, at five-second intervals, "Don't cry, Panther, dear!"

Then she jumped up, rubbed her eyes hard with the corners of her pinafore, so that they kept red for the rest of the day, and started to tell the boys. But just at that moment Eliza rang the dinner-bell, and nothing could be said till they had all been helped to minced beef. Then Eliza left the room and Anthea told her tale. But it is a mistake to tell a thrilling tale when people are eating minced beef and boiled potatoes. There seemed somehow to be something about the food that made the idea of Red Indians appear flat and unbelievable. The boys actually laughed and called Anthea a little silly.

"Why," said Cyril, "I'm almost sure it was before I said that that Jane said she wished it would be a fine day."

"It wasn't," said Jane briefly.

"Why, if it was Indians," Cyril went on—"salt, please, and mustard; I must have something to make this mush go down—if it was Indians they'd have been infesting the place long before this. You know they would. I believe it's the fine day."

"Then why did the sammyadd say we'd let ourselves in for a nice thing?" asked Anthea. She was feeling very cross. She knew she had acted with nobility and discretion, and after that it was very hard to be called a little silly, especially when she had the weight of a burglared missionary box and about seven and fourpence, mostly in coppers, lying like lead upon her conscience.

There was a silence, during which Eliza took away the mincy plates and brought in the treacle-pudding. As soon as she had retired Cyril began again.

"Of course, I don't mean to say," he admitted, "that it wasn't a good thing to get Martha and the Lamb out of the light for the afternoon, but as for Red Indians—why, you know jolly well the wishes always come that very minute. If there was going to be Red Indians they'd be here now."

"AS ONE GIFTED MOVE."

"I expect they are," said Anthea; "they're lurking amid the undergrowth, for anything you know. I do think you're most beastly unkind."

"Indians almost always *do* lurk, really, though, don't they?" put in Jane, anxious for peace.

"No, they don't," said Cyril, tartly. "And I'm not unkind, I'm only truthful. And I say it was utter rot breaking the water jug, and as for the missionary box I believe it's a treason-crime, and I shouldn't wonder if you could be hanged for it, if any of us was to split."

"Shut up, can't you?" said Robert, but Cyril couldn't. You see, he felt in his heart that if there *should* be Indians they would be entirely his own fault, so he did not wish to believe in them. And trying not to believe things when in your heart you are almost sure they are true is as bad for the temper as anything I know.

"It's simply idiotic," he said, "talking about Indians, when you can see for yourselves that it's Jane who's got her wish. Look what a fine day it is—*Oh!*"

He had turned towards the window to point out the fineness of the day. The others turned too—and a frozen silence caught at Cyril, and none of the others felt at all like breaking it. For there, peering round the corner of the window, among the red leaves of the Virginian creeper, was a face—a brown face with a long nose and a tight mouth and very bright eyes. And the face was painted in coloured patches. It had long black hair, and in the hair were feathers!

Every child's mouth in the room opened, and stayed open. The treacle-pudding was growing white and cold on their plates. No one could move.

Suddenly the feathered head was cautiously withdrawn and the spell was broken. I am sorry to say that Anthea's first words were very like a girl.

"There now!" she said. "I told you so!"

Treacle-pudding had now definitely ceased to charm. Hastily wrapping their portions in a *Spectator* of the week before the week before last, they hid them behind the crinkled paper stove-ornament, and fled upstairs to reconnoitre and to hold a hurried council.

"Pax," said Cyril, handsomely, when they reached their mother's bedroom. "Panther, I'm sorry if I was a brute."

"All right," said Anthea, "but you see now!"

No further trace of Indians, however, could be discerned from the windows

"Well," said Robert, "what are we to do?"

"The only thing I can think of," said Anthea, who was now generally admitted to be the heroine of the day, "is, if we dressed up as like Indians as we can, and looked out of the windows or even went out, they might think we were the powerful leaders of a large neighbouring tribe and—and not do anything to us, you know, for fear of awful vengeance."

"But Eliza and the cook?" said Jane.

"You forget; they can't notice anything," said Robert. "They wouldn't notice anything out of the way even if they were scalped or roasted at a slow fire."

"But would they come right at sunset?"

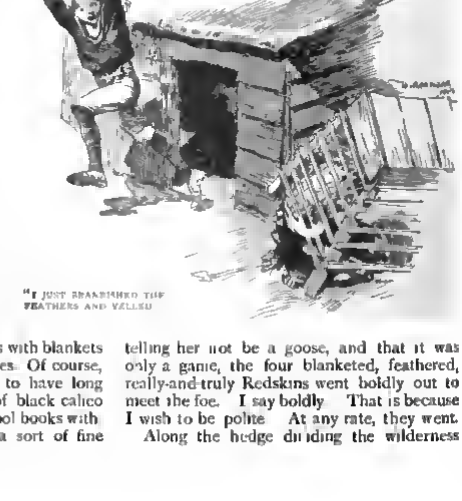
"Of course. You can't be really scalped or burned to death without noticing it, and you'd be sure to notice it next day, even if it escaped your attention at the time," said Cyril. "I think Anthea's right, but we shall want a most awful lot of feathers."

"I'll go down to the hen house," said Robert. "There's one of the turkeys in there; it's not very well. I could cut its feathers without it minding much. It's very bad, doesn't seem to care what happens to it. Get me the cutting-out scissors."

Earnest reconnoitring convinced them all that no Indians were in the poultry-yard. Robert went.

In five minutes he came back—pale, but with many feathers.

"Look here," he said, "this is jolly serious. I cut off the feathers, and when I turned to come out there was an Indian squinting at me from under the old hen-coop. I just brandished the feathers and yelled and got away before he could get the coop off the top of himself. Panther, get the coloured blankets off our beds, and look slippy, can't you?"



"I JUST BRANDISHED THE FEATHERS AND YELLED."

It is wonderful how like an Indian you can make yourselves with blankets and feathers and coloured scarves. Of course, none of the children happened to have long black hair, but there was a lot of black calico that had been got to cover school books with. They cut strips of this into a sort of fine fringe and fastened it round their heads with the amber-coloured ribbons off the girls' Sunday dresses. Then they stuck turkey feathers in the ribbons. The calico looked very like long black hair, especially when the strips began to curl up a bit.

"But our faces," said Anthea; "they're not at all the right colour. We're all rather pale, and I'm sure I don't know why. Cyril is the colour of putty."

"I'm not," said Cyril.

"The real Indians outside seem to be brownish," said Robert, hastily. "I think we ought to be really red; it's sort of superior to *have* a red skin, if you *are* one."

The red ochre cook uses for the kitchen bricks seemed to be about the reddest thing in the house. The children mixed some in a saucer with milk, as they had seen cook do for the kitchen floor. Then they carefully painted each other's faces and hands with it, till they were quite as red as any Red Indian need be, if not redder.

They knew at once that they must look very terrible when they met Eliza in the passage and she screamed aloud. This unsolicited testimonial pleased them very much. Hastily telling her not be a goose, and that it was only a game, the four blanketed, feathered, really-and-truly Redskins went boldly out to meet the foe. I say boldly. That is because I wish to be polite. At any rate, they went.

Along the hedge dividing the wilderness

from the garden was a row of dark heads, all highly feathered.

"It's our only chance," whispered Anthea. "Much better than to wait for their blood-freezing attack We must pretend like mad —like that game of cards where you pretend you've got aces when you haven't. Fluffing, they call it, I think. Now then. Whoop!"

With four wild war whoops—or as near them as English children could be expected to go without any previous practice—they rushed through the gate and struck four war-like attitudes in face of the line of Red Indians These were all about the same height, and that height was Cyril's.

"I hope to goodness they can talk English," said Cyril, through his attitude.

Anthea knew they could, though she never knew how she came to know it. She had a white towel tied to a walking-stick. This

"'YE SEEK A POW-WOW?' HE SAID."

was a flag of truce, and she waved it, in the hope that the Indians would know what it was. Apparently they did, for one who was browner than the others stepped forward

"Ye seek a pow wow?" he said, in excellent English. "I am Snake-skin, of the mighty tribe of Rock-dwellers"

"Aod I," said Anthea, with a sudden inspiration, "am the Black Panther—chief of the—the—the—Mazzawattee tribe. My brothers—I don't mean—yes I do—the tribe—I mean the Mazzawattees—are in ambush below the brow of yonder hill."

"And what mighty warriors be these?" asked Snakeskin, turning to the others.

Cyril said he was the great chief Squirrel of the Moning Congo tribe, and seeing that Jane was sucking her thumb, and could evidently think of no name for herself, he added, "This great warrior is Wild Cat—Pussy Ferox we call it in this land—leader of the vast Phit-eezi tribe."

"And thou, valorous Redskin?" Snakeskin inquired, suddenly, of Robert, who, taken unawares, could only reply that he was the great chief Bobs—leader of the Cape Mounted Police.

"And now," said Black Panther, "our tribes—if we just whistle them up—will far outnumber your puny forces So resistance is useless. Return, therefore, to your own land, O brother, and smoke pipes of peace in your wampums with your squaws and your medicine men, and dress yourselves in gayest wig-wams, and eat happily of the juicy, fresh-caught moccasins."

"You've got it all wrong," murmured Cyril, angrily But Snakeskin only looked inquiringly at her.

"Thy customs are other than ours, O

Black Panther," he said. "Bring up thy tribe that we may hold pow-wow in state before them, as becomes great chiefs."

"We'll bring them up right enough," said Anthea, "with their bows and arrows and tomahawks and scalping-knives, and everything you can think of, if you don't look sharp and go."

She spoke bravely enough, but the hearts of all the children were beating furiously, and their breath came in shorter and shorter gasps. For the little real Red Indians were closing up round them—coming nearer and nearer with angry murmurs—so that they were the centre of a crowd of dark, cruel faces.

"It's no go," whispered Robert. "I knew it wouldn't be. We must make a bolt for the psammead. It might help us. If it doesn't—well, I suppose we shall come alive again at sunset. I wonder if scalping hurts as much as they say?"

"I'll wave the flag again," said Anthea. "If they stand back we'll run for it."

She waved the towel, and the chief commanded his followers to stand back. Then, charging wildly at the place where the line of Indians was thinnest, the four children started to run. Their first rush knocked down some half-dozen Indians, over whose blanketed bodies the children leaped and made straight for the sand-pit. This was no time for the safe, easy way by which carts go down; right over the edge of the sand-pit they went, among the yellow and pale purple flowers and dried grasses, past the little sand-martin's little front doors, skipping, clinging, bounding, stumbling, sprawling, and finally rolling.

Snakeskin and his followers came up with them just at the very spot where they had seen the psammead that morning.

Breathless and defeated, the wretched children now awaited their fate. Sharp knives and axes gleamed round them, but worse than these was the cruel light in the eyes of Snakeskin and his followers.

"Ye have lied to us, O Black Panther of the Mazzawattees—and thou, too, Squirrel of the Morning Congos. These also—Pussy Ferox of the Phit eezi and Bobs of the Cape Mounted Police—these also have lied to us, if not with their tongues, yet by their silence. Ye have lied under the cover of the truce flag of the pale-face. Ye have no followers. Your tribes are far away—following the hunting trail. What shall be their doom?" he concluded, turning with a bitter smile to the other Red Indians.

"Build we the fire!" shouted his followers, and at once a dozen ready volunteers started to look for fuel. The four children, each held between two strong little Indians, cast despairing glances round them. Oh, if they could only see the psammead!

"Do you mean to scalp us first and then roast us?" asked Anthea, desperately.

"Of course!" Snakeskin opened his eyes at her; "it's always done."

The Indians had formed a ring round the children and now sat on the ground gazing at their captives. There was a threatening silence.

Then slowly by twos and threes the Indians who had gone to look for firewood came back, and they came back empty-handed. They had not been able to find a single stick of wood for a fire! No one ever can, as a matter of fact, in that part of Kent.

The children drew a deep breath of relief, but it ended in a moan of terror, for bright knives were being brandished all about them. Next moment each child was seized by an Indian—each closed its eyes and tried not to scream. They waited for the sharp agony of the knife. It did not come. Next moment they were released and fell in a trembling heap. Their heads did not hurt at all. They only felt strangely cool. Wild war-whoops rang in their ears. When they ventured to open their eyes they saw four of their foes dancing round them with wild leaps and screams, and each of the four brandished in his hand a scalp of long, flowing black hair. They put their hands to their heads—their own scalps were safe. The poor, untutored savages had, indeed, scalped the children. But they had only, so to speak, scalped them of the black calico ringlets!

The children fell into each other's arms, sobbing and laughing.

"Their scalps are ours," chanted the chief. "Ill-rooted were their ill-fated hairs! They came off in the hands of the victors, without struggle, without resistance, they yielded their scalps to the conquering Snakeskin! Oh, how little a thing is a scalp so lightly won!"

"They'll take our real ones in a minute, you see if they don't," said Robert, trying to rub some of the red ochre off his face and hands on to his hair.

"Cheated of our just and fiery revenge are we," the chant went on, "but there are other torments than the scalping-knife and the flames. Yet is the slow fire the correct thing. Oh, strange, unnatural country wherein

"THEY SAW FOUR OF THEIR FOES DANCING ROUND THEM WITH WILD LEAPS AND SCREAMS"

a man may find no wood to burn his enemy! Ah, for the boundless forests of my native land, where the great trees for thousands of miles grow but to furnish firewood wherewithal to burn our foes Ah, would we were but in our native forest once more."

Suddenly, like a flash of lightning, the golden gravel shone all round the four children instead of the dusky figures. For every single Indian had vanished on the instant at their leader's word The psammead must have been there all the time. And it had given the Indian chief his wish!

Martha brought home a jug with a pattern of storks and long grasses on it; also she brought back all Anthea's money.

"My cousin, she give me the jug for luck. She said it was an odd one what the basin of had got smashed."

"Oh, Martha, you are a dear!" sighed Anthea, throwing her arms round her.

"Yes," giggled Martha, "you'd better make the most of me while you've got me I shall give your ma notice directly the minute she comes back."

"Oh, Martha, we haven't been so *very* horrid to you, have we?" asked Anthea, aghast

"Oh, it ain't that, miss," Martha giggled more than ever. "I'm a goin' to be married. It's Beale, the gamekeeper. He's been a-proposin' to me off and on ever since you come home from the clergyman's, where you got locked up on the church tower And to-day I said the word an' made him a happy man."

Anthea put the seven and fourpence back in the missionary-box and pasted paper over the place where the poker had broken it. She was very glad to be able to do this, and she does not know to this day whether breaking open a missionary-box is or is not a hanging matter.

By E Nesbit

IX.—THE LAST WISH

Of course, you who see above that this is the ninth (and last) chapter know very well that the day of which this chapter tells must be the last on which Cyril, Anthea, Robert, and Jane will have a chance of getting anything out of the psammead, or sand fairy.

But the children themselves did not know this. They were full of rosy visions, and whereas on other days they had often found it extremely difficult to think of anything really nice to wish for, their brains were now full of the most beautiful and sensible ideas. "This," as Jane remarked afterwards, "is always the way." Everyone was up extra early that morning, and these plans were hopefully discussed in the garden before breakfast. The old idea of a hundred pounds in modern florins was still first favourite, but there were others that ran it close—the chief of these being the "pony each" idea. This had a great advantage. You could wish for a pony each during the morning, ride it all day, have it vanish at sunset, and wish it back again next day; which would be an economy of litter and stabling. But at breakfast two things happened. First, there was a letter from mother. Granny was better, and mother and father hoped to be home that very afternoon. A cheer arose. And, of course, this news at once scattered all the before-breakfast wish-ideas, for everyone saw quite plainly that the wish of the day must be something to please mother and not to please themselves.

"I wonder what she *would* like?" pondered Cyril.

"She'd like us all to be good," said Jane, primly.

"Yes, but that's so dull for us," Cyril rejoined, "and, besides, I should hope we could be that without sand-fairies to help us. No, it must be something splendid, that we couldn't possibly get without wishing for."

"Look out," said Anthea, in a warning voice; "don't forget yesterday. Remember, we get our wishes now just wherever we happen to be when we say 'I wish.' Don't let's let ourselves in for anything silly to-day of all days."

"All right," said Cyril, "you needn't jaw."

Just then Martha came in with a jugful of hot water for the teapot, and a face full of importance for the children.

"A blessing we're all alive to eat our breakfasses," she said, darkly.

"Why, whatever's happened?" everybody asked.

"Oh, nothing," said Martha, "only it seems nobody's safe from being murdered in their beds nowadays."

"Why," said Jane, as an agreeable thrill of horror ran down her back and legs and out at her toes, "*has* anyone been murdered in their beds?"

"Well, not exactly," said Martha, "but they might just as well; there's been burglars over at Peasemarsh Place—Beale's just told me, and they've took every single one of Lady Chittenden's diamonds and jewels and things, and she's a goin' out of one fainting fit into another with hardly time to say 'Oh, my diamonds!' in between. And Lord Chittenden's away in London."

"Lady Chittenden?" said Anthea. "We've seen her. She wears a red and white dress, and she has no children of her own and can't abide other folks's."

"That's her," said Martha. "Well, she's put all her trust in riches—and you see how she's served. They say the diamonds and things was worth thousands of pounds. There was a necklace and a river—whatever that is—and no end of bracelets, and a tarrer and ever so many rings. But there, I mustn't stand talking, and all the place to clean down afore your ma come home."

"I don't see why she should ever have had such lots of diamonds," said Anthea, when Martha had flounced off. "She was rather a nasty lady, I thought. And mother hasn't any diamonds and hardly any jewels—the topaz necklace, and the sapphire ring daddy gave her when they were engaged, and the garnet star, and the little pearl brooch with great grandpapa's hair in it—that's about all."

EVERY ONE OF THE CHILDREN SEARCHED MOTHER'S ROOM.

"When I'm grown up I'll buy mother no end of diamonds," said Robert, "if she wants them. I shall make so much money exploring Africa I sha'n't know what to do with it."

"Wouldn't it be jolly," said Jane, dreamily, "if mother could find all those lovely things—necklaces and rivers of diamonds and tarrers?"

"Tiaras," said Cyril.

"Tiaras, then—and rings and everything in her room when she came home. I wish she would——"

The others gazed at her in horror.

"Well, she *will*," said Robert. "You've wished, my good Jane, and our only chance now is to find the psammead, and, if it's in a good temper, it *may* take back the wish and give us another. If not—well, goodness knows what we're in for—the police, of course, and——Don't cry, silly—we'll stand by you. Father says we need never be afraid if we don't do anything wrong and always speak the truth."

But Cyril and Anthea exchanged gloomy glances. They remembered how convincing the truth about the psammead had been once before when told to the police.

It was a day of misfortunes. Of course, the psammead could not be found; nor the jewels, though every one of the children searched mother's room again and again.

"Of course," Robert said, "*we* couldn't find them. It'll be mother who'll do that. Perhaps she'll think they've been in the house for years and years, and never know they are the stolen ones at all."

"Oh, yes." Cyril was very scornful. "Then mother will be a receiver of stolen goods, and you know jolly well what *that's* worse than."

Another and exhaustive search of the sandpit failed to reveal the psammead, so the children went back to the house slowly and sadly.

"I don't care," said Anthea, stoutly. "We'll tell mother the truth, and she'll give back the jewels and make everything all right."

"Do you think so?" said Cyril, slowly. "Do you think she'll believe us? Could anyone believe about a sammyadd unless they'd seen it? She'll think we're pretending. Or else she'll think we're raving mad, and then we shall be sent to Bedlam. How would you like it?"—he turned suddenly on the miserable Jane—"how would you like it to be shut up in an iron cage with bars and padded walls, and nothing to do but stick straws in your hair all day and listen to the howlings and ravings of the other maniacs? Make up your minds to it, all of you. It's no use telling mother."

"But it's true," said Jane.

"Of course it is, but it's not true enough for grown-up people to believe it," said Anthea. "Cyril's right. Let's put flowers in all the vases and try not to think about the diamonds. After all, everything has come right in the end all the other times."

So they filled every pot in the house with flowers—asters and zinnias, and loose-leaved late red roses from the wall of the stable-yard—till the house was a perfect bower.

And almost as soon as dinner was cleared away mother arrived, and was clasped in eight loving arms. It was very difficult indeed not to tell her all about the psammead at once, because they had got into the habit of telling her everything. But they did succeed in not telling her.

Mother, on her side, had plenty to tell them—about granny, and granny's pigeons, and Auntie Emma's lame tame donkey. She was very delighted with the flowery boweryness of the house, and everything seemed so natural and pleasant now that she was home again that the children almost thought they must have dreamed the psammead.

But when mother moved towards the stairs to go up to her bedroom and take off her bonnet the eight arms clung round her just as if she only had two children—one the Lamb and the other an octopus.

"Don't go up, mummy darling," said Anthea; "let me take your things up for you."

"Or I will," said Cyril.

"We want you to come and look at the rose tree," said Robert.

"Oh, don't go up," said Jane, helplessly.

"THE RIGHT ARMS CLUNG ROUND HER"

"Nonsense, dears," said mother, briskly. "I'm not such an old woman yet that I can't take my bonnet off in the proper place. Besides, I must wash these black hands of mine."

So up she went, and the children, following her, exchanged glances of gloomy foreboding.

Mother took off her bonnet—it was a very pretty hat really, with white roses in it—and when she had taken it off she went to the dressing-table to do her pretty hair.

On the table between the ring stand and the pincushion lay a green leather case. Mother opened it.

"Oh, how lovely!" she cried. It was a ring—a blue sapphire with shining, many lighted diamonds set round it. "Wherever did this come from?" mother asked, trying it on her wedding-finger, where it fitted beautifully. "However did it come here?"

"I don't know," said each of the children, truthfully.

"Father must have told Martha to put it here," mother said. "I'll run down and ask her."

"Let me look at it," said Anthea, who knew Martha would not be able to see the ring. But when Martha was asked, of course she denied putting the ring there, and so did Eliza and cook.

Mother came back to her bedroom very much interested and pleased about the ring. But when she opened the dressing-table drawer and found a long case containing an almost priceless diamond necklace she was more interested still, though not so pleased. In the wardrobe, when she went to put away her bonnet, she found a tiara and several brooches, and the rest of the jewellery turned up in various parts of the room during the next half-hour. The children looked more and more uncomfortable, and now Jane began to sniff.

Mother looked at her gravely.

"Jane," she said, "I am sure you know something about this. Now, think before you speak, and tell me the truth."

"We found a fairy," said Jane, obediently.

"No nonsense, please," said her mother, sharply.

"Don't be silly, Jane," Cyril interrupted.

"WE FOUND A FAIRY," SAID JANE, OBEDIENTLY.

Then he went on, desperately: "Look here, mother, we've never seen the things before, but Lady Chittenden at Peasemarsh Place lost all her jewellery by wicked burglars last night. Could this possibly be it?"

All drew a deep breath. They were saved.

"But how could they have put it here? And why should they?" asked mother, not unreasonably. "Surely it would have been easier and safer to make off with it?"

"Suppose," said Cyril, "they thought it better to wait for—for sunset—nightfall, I mean, before they went off with it. No one but us knew that you were coming back to-day."

"I must send for the police at once," said

mother, distractedly. "Oh, how I wish daddy were here!"

"Wouldn't it be better to wait till he *does* come?" asked Robert, knowing that his father would not be home before sunset.

"No, no, I can't wait a minute with all this on my mind," cried mother. "All this" was the heap of jewel-cases on the bed. They put them all in the wardrobe and mother locked it. Then mother called Martha.

"Martha," she said, "has any stranger been into my room since I've been away? Now, answer me truthfully."

"No, mum," answered Martha; "least ways, what I mean to say——"

She stopped.

"Come," said her mistress, kindly, "I see someone has. You must tell me at once. Don't be frightened; I'm sure *you* haven't had anything to do with it."

"MARTHA BURST INTO HEAVY SOBS."

Martha burst into heavy sobs.

"I was a goin' to give you warning this very day, mum, to leave at the end of my month, so I was—on account of me being going to make a respectable young man happy, a gamekeeper he is by trade, mum, and I wouldn't deceive you, of the name of Beale. And it's as true as I stand here. It was your coming home in such a hurry, and no warning given, out of the kindness of his heart, it was, as he says, 'Martha, my beauty,' he says, which I ain't and never was, but you know how them men will go on, 'I can't see you a toiling and a moiling, and not lend you a 'elping 'and—which mine is a strong arm, and it's yours, Martha, my dear,' says he; and so he helped me a-cleanin' of the windows—but outside, mum, the whole time, and me in; if I never say another breathing word, it's the gospel truth."

"Were you with him the whole time?" asked her mistress.

"Him outside and me in, I was," said Martha, "except for fetching up a fresh pail and the leather that that slut of a Eliza'd hidden away behind the mangle."

"That will do," said the children's mother. "I am not pleased with you, Martha, but you have spoken the truth, and that counts for something."

When Martha had gone the children clung round their mother.

"Oh, mummy darling," cried Anthea, "it isn't Beale's fault, it isn't really. He's a great dear, he is, truly and honourably, and as honest as the day. Don't let the police take him, mummy, oh, don't, don't, don't!"

It was truly awful. Here was an innocent man accused of robbery through that silly wish of Jane's, and it was absolutely useless to tell the truth. All longed to, but they thought of the straws in the hair and the shrieks of the other frantic maniacs, and they could not do it.

"Is there a cart hereabouts?" asked mother, feverishly. "A trap of any sort; I must drive in to Rochester and tell the police at once."

All the children sobbed. "There's a cart at the farm, but oh, don't go!—don't go!—oh, don't go!—wait till daddy comes home."

Mother took not the faintest notice. When

she had set her mind on a thing she always went straight through with it. She was rather like Anthea in this respect.

"Look here, Cyril," she said, sticking on her hat with long, sharp, silver-headed pins, "I leave you in charge. Stay in the dressing-room. You can pretend to be swimming boats in the bath, or something. Say I gave you leave. But stay there, with the landing-door open; I've locked the other. And don't let anyone go into my room. Remember, no one knows the jewels are there except me—and all of you, and the wicked thieves who put them there. Robert, you stay in the garden and watch the windows. If anyone tries to get in you must run and tell the two farm men that I'll send up to wait in the kitchen. I'll tell them there are dangerous characters about—that's true enough. Now, remember, I trust you both. But I don't think they'll try it till after dark, so you're quite safe. Good-bye, darlings."

And she locked her bedroom door and went off with the key in her pocket.

The children could not help admiring the dashing and decided way in which she had acted. They thought how useful she would have been in organizing escape from some of the tight places in which they had found themselves of late, in consequence of their ill-timed wishes.

"She's a born general," said Cyril, "but *I* don't know what's going to happen to us. Even if the girls were to hunt for that beastly sammyadd and find it, and get it to take the jewels away again, mother would only think we hadn't looked out properly, and let the burglars sneak in and nick them, or else the police will think *we've* got them, or else that she's been fooling them. Oh, it's a pretty decent average ghastly mess this time, and no mistake."

He savagely made a paper boat and began to float it in the bath, as he had been told, but he did not seem to find it amusing.

Robert went into the garden and sat down on the worn, yellow grass, with his miserable head between his helpless hands.

Anthea and Jane whispered together in the passage downstairs, where the cocoanut matting was with the hole in it that you always catch your foot in if you're not careful. Martha's voice could be heard in the kitchen, grumbling loud and long.

"It's simply quite too dreadfully awful," said Anthea. "How do we know all the diamonds are there too? If they aren't the police will think mother and father have got them, and that they've only given up some of them for a kind of desperate blind. And they'll be put in prison and we shall be branded outcasts, the children of felons. And it won't be at all nice for father and mother either," she added, by a candid after-thought.

"But what can we *do*?" asked Jane.

"Nothing; at least, we might look for the sammyadd again. It's a very, *very* hot day. He may have come out to warm that whisker of his."

"He won't give us any more beastly wishes to-day," said Jane, flatly. "He gets crosser and crosser every time we see him. I believe he hates having to give wishes." Anthea had been shaking her head gloomily; now she stopped shaking it so suddenly that it really looked as though she were pricking up her ears.

"What is it?" asked Jane. "Oh, have you thought of something?"

"Our one chance," cried Anthea, dramatically; "the last, lone, forlorn hope! Come on!"

At a brisk trot she led the way to the sandpit. Oh, joy! there was the psammead, basking in a golden sandy hollow and preening its whiskers happily in the glowing afternoon sun. The moment it saw them it whisked round and began to burrow—it evidently preferred its own company to theirs. But Anthea was too quick for it. She caught it by its furry shoulders gently but firmly, and held it.

"Here—none of that," said the psammead, "leave go of me, will you?"

But Anthea held him fast.

"Dear, kind, darling sammyadd," she said, breathlessly.

"Oh, yes, it's all very well," it said, "you want another wish, I expect, but I can't keep on slaving from morning till night giving people their wishes. I must have some time to myself."

"Do you hate giving wishes?" asked Anthea, gently, and her voice trembled with excitement.

"Of course I do," it said. "Leave go of me or I'll bite; I really will—I mean it. Oh, well, if you choose to risk it——"

Anthea risked it and held on.

"Look here," she said, "don't bite me; listen to reason. If you'll only do what we want to-day we'll never ask you for another wish as long as we live."

The psammead was much moved.

"I'd do anything," it said, in a tearful voice. "I'd almost burst myself to give you one wish after another as long as I held out

SHE CAUGHT IT BY ITS FURRY SHOULDERS.

if you'd only never, never ask me to do it after to-day. If you knew how I hate to blow myself out with other people's wishes, and how frightened I am always that I shall strain a muscle or something! And then to wake up every morning and know you've *got* to do it. You don't know what it is—you don't know what it is—you don't." Its voice cracked with emotion, and the last "don't" was a squeak.

Anthea set it down gently on the sand.

"It's all over now," she said, soothingly. "We promise faithfully never to ask for another wish after to-day."

"Well, go ahead," said the psammead; "let's get it over."

"How many can you do?"

"I don't know; as long as I can hold out."

"Well, first, I wish Lady Chittenden may find she's never lost her jewels."

The psammead blew itself out, collapsed, and said, "Done!"

"I wish," said Anthea, more slowly, "mother mayn't get to the police."

"Done!" said the creature, after the proper interval.

"I wish," said Jane, suddenly, "mother could forget all about the diamonds."

"Done!" said the psammead, but its voice was weaker.

"Would you like to rest a little?" asked Anthea, considerately.

"Yes, please," said the psammead; "and before we go any farther, will you wish something for me?"

"Can't you do wishes for yourself?"

"Of course not," it said; "we were always expected to give each other our wishes — not that we had any to speak of in the good old megatherium days. Just wish, will you, that you may never be able, any of you, to tell any one a word about *me*."

"Why?" asked Jane.

"Why, don't you see, if you told grown ups I should have no peace of my life. They'd get hold of me, and they wouldn't wish silly things like you do, but real earnest things, and the scientific people would hit on some way of making things last after sunset, as likely as not, and they'd ask for a graduated income-tax, and old-age pensions, and manhood suffrage, and free secondary education, and dull things like that, and get them and keep them, and the whole world would be turned topsy-turvy. Do wish it. Quick."

Anthea repeated the psammead's wish, and it blew itself out to a larger size than they had yet seen it attain.

"And now," it said as it collapsed, "can I do anything more for you?"

"Just one thing, and I think that clears everything up, doesn't it, Jane? I wish Martha to forget about the diamond ring, and mother to forget about the keeper cleaning the windows."

"It's like Anstey's 'Brass Bottle,'" said Jane.

"Yes; I'm glad we had that or I should never have thought of it."

"Now," said the psammead, faintly, "I'm almost worn out. Is there anything else?"

"No; only thank you kindly for all you've done for us, and I hope you'll have a good, long sleep, and I hope we shall see you again some day."

"Is that a wish?" it said, in a weak voice.

"Yes, please," said the two girls together.

Then, for the last time, they saw the psammead blow itself out and collapse suddenly. It nodded to them, blinked its long snail's eyes, burrowed and disappeared, scratching fiercely to the last, and the sand closed over it.

"So you see it's all right," Jane whispered. "She doesn't remember."

"No more does Martha," said Anthea, who had been to ask after the state of the kettle

As the servants sat at their tea, Beale, the gamekeeper, dropped in. He brought the welcome news that Lady Chittenden's jewels had not been lost at all. Lord

"IT BURROWED AND DISAPPEARED, SCRATCHING FIERCELY TO THE LAST"

"I hope we've done right," said Jane.

"I'm sure we have," said Anthea; "come on home and tell the boys"

Anthea found Cyril glooming over his paper boats and told him. Jane told Robert. The two tales were only just ended when mother walked in, hot and dusty. She explained that as she was being driven into Rochester to buy the girls' autumn school dresses the axle had broken, and but for the narrowness of the lane and the high, soft hedges she would have been thrown out. As it was she was not hurt, but she had had to walk home. "And oh, my dearest, dear chicks," she said, "I am simply dying for a cup of tea. Do run and see if the kettle boils!"

Chittenden had taken them to be reset and cleaned, and the maid who knew about it had gone for a holiday. So that was all right.

"I wonder if we ever shall see the sammyadd again?" said Jane, wistfully, as they walked in the garden while mother was putting the Lamb to bed

"I'm sure we shall," said Cyril, "if you really wished it."

"We've promised never to ask it for another wish," said Anthea

"I never want to," said Robert, earnestly.

They did see the psammead again, of course, but not in this story. And it was not in a sandpit either, but in a very, very, very different place. It was in a——but I must say no more